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THESIS

**RETURN OF THE BEAR? RUSSIA'S TIES WITH
FORMER SOVIET ALLIES IN LATIN AMERICA**

by

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March 2016

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IN LATIN AMERICA**

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ABSTRACT

Comparing Soviet ties with Cuba and Sandinista-led Nicaragua during the Cold War to Russian ties with Cuba and Nicaragua today, this thesis finds that Russia's reengagement with former Soviet allies in Latin America does not portend a return of the Soviet "bear" to the U.S. periphery. Daniel Ortega-led Nicaragua and the Castro regime in Cuba have indeed again become politically close with Russia and have each developed some security and economic ties with Russia since at least late 2008. Their mutual political support against Western positions at the UN and Russia's sporadic naval deployments and strategic bomber flights, as well as counter-narcotics cooperation with Nicaragua, may seemingly present a notable challenge to the United States in its periphery. Yet, Russia's ties—particularly security and economic ties—with the former Soviet allies remain rather narrow and do not present a significant challenge to the United States. As such, this thesis recommends that U.S. policymakers not adopt a "red scare" mentality about Russia's reengagement with its Cold War allies. Nonetheless, the United States should remain engaged with not only its partners in the region but also with Russian allies there to hinder further Russian engagement that may run counter to U.S. interests.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALBA	Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
BMD	ballistic missile defense
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CAFTA-DR	Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement
CDCM	coastal defense cruise missile
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
FDI	foreign direct investment
FSKN	Russian Federal Drug Control Service
FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front
GDP	gross domestic product
GLONASS	Global Navigation Satellite System
HF/DF	high-frequency/direction-finding
ICJ	International Court of Justice
LDC	less-developed country
MANPADS	man-portable air defense system
MRBM	medium-range ballistic missile
MRL	multiple-rocket launcher
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OLAS	Organization of Latin American Solidarity
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PCC	Communist Party of Cuba
PSN	<i>Partido Socialista Nicaragüense</i>
PSP	<i>Partido Socialista Popular</i>
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SICA	Central American Integration System
TSRA	Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act
UN	United Nations
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

In February 2014, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu stated that Russia wanted to open military bases in Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, and some countries in Asia.¹ After Shoigu's subsequent visit to those Latin American countries in February 2015 to make agreements for military cooperation, his deputy, Anatoly Antonov, clarified Russia's plans. Ostensibly, Russia did not seek actual military bases but rather a series of locations for resupply, maintenance, and crew rest for its ships when deployed to the region and for its aircraft when flying missions there.² Given those ostensible aims, one may wonder just how close ties are between Russia and those states. One may wonder whether Russia is merely seeking strategic allies or if the Soviet "bear" is returning to the Western Hemisphere, especially since the incumbent leaders of two of those states—the Castro regime in Cuba and President Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua—were also Soviet allies during the Cold War.

This thesis seeks to assess the extent of Russia's ties with former Soviet allies in Latin America—namely Nicaragua and Cuba—in terms of political, security, and economic ties. The thesis compares Russia's ties with the Nicaraguan and Cuban regimes in the contemporary era with the Soviet Union's ties with those regimes during the Cold War to assess the extent to which Russia has made a comeback in the U.S. periphery. That assessment will have implications for U.S. policy.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is significant because while Russia was invading Ukraine, it was also expanding in Latin America—though this expansion received little attention.³

¹ Zachary Keck, "Russia Says It's Building Naval Bases in Asia, Latin America," *Diplomat*, February 28, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/russia-says-its-building-naval-bases-in-asia-latin-america/>.

² "Russia Has No Plans to Create Military Bases in Latin America," *Sputnik News*, February 15, 2015, <http://sptnkne.ws/advG>.

³ Stephen Blank, "Russia's Goals, Strategy and Tactics in Latin America," LACC/ARC/U.S. Southern Command Policy Roundtable Series, Miami, FL, April 28, 2014, 2, <http://lacc.fiu.edu/research/publications/security-roundtable-2014-blank-paper.pdf>.

Limited scholarly works exist concerning Russia's reengagement with Latin American states, though works about China's involvement have grown precipitously.⁴ R. Evan Ellis says, "While Russia's activity may be on a small scale and limited to a handful of states and sectors, its presence will likely be a persistent facet of the new globally-interconnected strategic environment currently reshaping the region."⁵ According to Ellis, Russian engagement—to an extent—undermines U.S. initiatives and relationships with states in the region, arms anti-U.S. states, and isolates states that are close to the United States.⁶ Unlike China, Russia has openly challenged U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere in recent years with deployments of naval vessels and flights of strategic bombers to the Caribbean, as well as talks on access to airfields and ports in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela.⁷

In his March 2015 posture statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Commander, U.S. Southern Command speaks of the increased Russian presence in Latin America. He says that in contrast to Chinese activities there,

Russian activities in the region are more concerning. Periodically since 2008, Russia has pursued an increased presence in Latin America through propaganda, military arms and equipment sales, counterdrug agreements, and trade. Under President Putin, however, we have seen a clear return to Cold War-tactics. As part of its global strategy, Russia is using power projection in an attempt to erode U.S. leadership and challenge U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere....Russia has courted Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua to gain access to air bases and ports for resupply of Russian naval assets and strategic bombers operating in the Western Hemisphere. Russian media also announced Russia would begin sending long-range strategic bombers to patrol the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico, in an effort to "monitor foreign powers' military activities and maritime communications." While these actions do not pose an immediate

⁴ R. Evan Ellis, *The New Russian Engagement with Latin America: Strategic Position, Commerce, and Dreams of the Past*. Strategic Studies Institute (Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army War College Press, June 17, 2015), 3, <https://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1275>.

⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁷ R. Evan Ellis, "Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean: Return to the 'Strategic Game' in a Complex-Interdependent Post-Cold War World?," Strategic Studies Institute, April 24, 2015, 1, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/Russian%ADEngagement%ADin%ADLatin%ADAmerica/2015/04/24>.

threat, Russia's activities in the hemisphere are concerning and underscore the importance of remaining engaged with our partners.⁸

Thus, the research question is significant because Russia's strategic reengagement in the region is a facet of the security environment that is of concern but that some government officials and scholars may be overlooking. Moreover, the literature does not clearly assess the degree of closeness between Russia and its former Soviet allies

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Is the Soviet Bear Back?

Douglas Farah and Liana Eustacia Reyes make a bold contention that Russia is now more influential in Latin America than it has ever been; even more than the Soviet Union ever was. They posit that this is the case despite U.S.-Cuban rapprochement and Russia's ongoing economic downturn. They say that Russian ties with the states of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA)—that is, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Cuba, and some other Caribbean island states—are firm.⁹ Regarding the extent of the ties, they explain that “the Putin government is providing ALBA nations with weapons, police and military training and equipment, nuclear technology, oil exploration equipment, financial assistance and an influential friend on the United Nations Security Council and in other international forums.”¹⁰ The ALBA states reportedly reciprocate by giving Russia diplomatic support to curb its international isolation, especially in light of the conflict in Crimea and Ukraine. For instance, the ALBA states and Argentina reportedly release messages of unflagging support for President Putin—and of condemnation of the United States—via a regional media network of state-owned websites, presidential Twitter accounts, and other media.

⁸ *U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command: Hearing Before the Comm. on Armed Services, Senate*, 114th Cong., 8–9 (March 12, 2015) (statement of General John F. Kelly, U.S. Marine Corps, Commander, U.S. Southern Command), http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Kelly_03-12-15.pdf.

⁹ Douglas Farah and Liana Eustacia Reyes, “Russia in Latin America: The Strategic Challenge,” *Perspectives on the Americas*, University of Miami Center for Hemispheric Policy, January 15, 2015, 2, https://umshare.miami.edu/web/wda/hemisphericpolicy/Perspectives_on_the_Americas/Farah%20-%20Final.pdf.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Moreover, ALBA states are ostensibly expanding port and airspace access for Russia's deployments.¹¹

Regarding the timing of the renewed ties between Russia and those Latin American states, Pablo Telman Sánchez Ramírez says that in 2008 diplomatic visits intensified between them and Russia had renewed its interest in the region.¹² That year was the Russian military's post-Cold War return to the region, marked by the first-ever visit of Russian strategic bombers and a naval surface action group to Venezuela. The ships also visited Nicaragua and Cuba.¹³ Ellis concurs that Russia's reengagement with Latin America thus began in 2008.¹⁴ Yet, Stephen Blank points out that Russia's renewed interest in Latin America did not begin in 2008, but rather Russia began attempts to influence the region starting with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov's visits to the region in 1997 and then ramped up economic efforts in 2003 and arms sales specifically in 2004.¹⁵ In reality, Primakov began visiting Latin American states in 1996, visiting Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, and Venezuela over the course of 1996 and 1997.¹⁶ During that time, Primakov reportedly commented that since Russia was still a great power, it should have relations with all parts of the globe.¹⁷

2. Geopolitical Positions: Challenging U.S. Supremacy

One argument in the literature is that Russia's reengagement with Latin American states is primarily for the purpose of challenging U.S. hegemony in the region, as part of an effort to create a multi-polar world. Stephen Blank and Younkyoo Kim contend that

¹¹ Farah and Reyes, "Russia in Latin America: The Strategic Challenge," 1–2.

¹² Pablo Telman Sánchez Ramírez, "Is a New Climate of Confrontation between Russia and the United States Possible in Latin America?" *Latin American Policy* 1, no. 2 (2010): 232. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2041-7373.2010.00017.x/abstract>.

¹³ Ibid., 235; see also: Lee Willett, "The Navy in Russia's 'Resurgence'," *The RUSI Journal* 154, no. 1 (2009): 51, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071840902818647>.

¹⁴ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 20.

¹⁵ Stephen Blank, "Russia in Latin America: Geopolitical Games in the US's Neighborhood," *Russie Nei Visioni* no. 38, Russia/NIS Center, IFRI, April 2009, 5, 8, <http://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifriblankrussiaandlatinamericaengapril09.pdf>.

¹⁶ Nikolas K. Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (Los Angeles: CQ Press, 2014), 376.

¹⁷ Blank, "Russia in Latin America: Geopolitical Games," 8.

there is an interconnection between Russia's arms sales, energy projects, and pursuit of military bases in the region.¹⁸ They argue that Russia's economic ties with the region—miniscule compared to those of the United States and China—are not Russia's primary concern, since Brazil and some countries that provide foodstuffs to Russia are the only ones to offer it any economic ties of real value. They argue instead that geostrategic interests—namely opposing the United States and creating multi-polarity globally—are central to Russia's engagement in the region, rather than interest in Latin American states' concerns.¹⁹ According to Nikolas Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, Primakov undertook his visits to the region in the late 1990s to promote multi-polarity.²⁰

Regarding the limited economic ties that do exist between Latin American states and Russia, Blank and Kim contend that Russia uses its ties in limited sectors in which it enjoys “comparative advantage”—arms sales, nuclear power, space launches, engineering—for the geopolitical purpose of leveraging “political support for Russian positions in world politics and against American interests.”²¹ Ariel Cohen and Ray Walser likewise offer that Russia uses arms sales “to gain friends and influence governments.”²² Carlos Malamud also mentions that Russia is merging its economic and political interests in Latin America, trying to take upon itself the role that the Soviet Union had previously played in the region. In doing so, Russia aligns itself mainly with

¹⁸ Stephen Blank and Younkyoo Kim, “Russia and Latin America: The New Frontier for Geopolitics, Arms Sales and Energy,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 3 (2015): 160–61, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1019817>.

¹⁹ Ibid., 160, 169; see also: W. Alejandro Sánchez, “Russia and Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 8, no. 4 (2010): 368, 377, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2010.522355>; Luis Fleischman, *Latin America in the Post-Chávez Era: The Security Threat to the United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2013), 149.

²⁰ Gvosdev and Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 376.

²¹ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 161.

²² Ariel Cohen and Ray Walser, “The Russia-Venezuela Axis: Using Energy for Geopolitical Advantage,” The Heritage Foundation, WebMemo no. 2000, July 21, 2008, 2–3, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/07/the-russia-venezuela-axis-using-energy-for-geopolitical-advantage>.

states that, like itself, have a confrontational relationship with the United States, namely the Bolivarian, or ALBA, states, as mentioned.²³

Moreover, Russia has involved itself with various multilateral regional associations—reportedly to increase its great power status relative to that of the United States.²⁴ Ellis indicates that Russia’s engagements with not only ALBA but also such regional forums as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) “strengthen its ties with the region in a way that excludes the United States.”²⁵ In November 2008, then President Medvedev attended the ALBA leadership summit in Caracas. Subsequently, in May 2013, the Russian foreign minister attended a meeting with the CELAC foreign ministers, and Putin reportedly conveyed desire to develop a relationship with CELAC.²⁶ Ellis says that “Russia has similarly indicated interest in ‘substantive interactions’ with UNASUR, the Pacific Alliance [and other regional alliances], notably ignoring a demonstration of interest in the Organization of American States (OAS), in which the United States and Canada are members.”²⁷

Meanwhile, Russia’s counter-narcotics efforts in the region may also be an effort to increase its influence. In 2012, the director of the Russian Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN), Viktor Ivanov, toured Latin America—visiting foreign ministers, police officials, and other officials in Nicaragua, Cuba, Mexico, El Salvador, Panama, and Brazil to solicit cooperation with Russia to counter illicit drug trafficking—even though the quantity of Latin American-produced drugs making their way to Russia has been relatively low.²⁸ Ostensibly, only three tons of the estimated 940 tons of cocaine

²³ Carlos Malamud, “Regional Integration and Cooperation in Latin America: Diagnosis and Proposals,” *Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies* 7, no. 2 (2015): 108, <http://eme.sagepub.com/content/7/2/92.full.pdf>.

²⁴ Stephen J. Blank, “Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences,” Challenges to Security in the Hemisphere Task Force, University of Miami Center for Hemispheric Policy, April 13, 2010, 5, https://umshare.miami.edu/web/wda/hemisphericpolicy/Blank_miamirusia_04-13-10.pdf.

²⁵ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁸ Alexander Marshall, *From Drug War to Culture War: Russia’s Growing Role in the Global Drug Debate*, Policy Brief 5, Global Drug Policy Observatory, Swansea University, July 2014, 16, <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/gdpo/files/GDPO%20Russia%20Article-1.pdf>.

produced in the Andes region every year go to Russia.²⁹ Nonetheless, Ivanov's outreach to the region is part of Russia's global "Rainbow-3" initiative to cooperatively counter trafficking at the centers of production in Afghanistan and Latin America by focusing on development problems, namely unemployment and poverty.³⁰ Thus, Ivanov's Rainbow-3 differs from U.S. initiatives like Plan Colombia and the Mérida Initiative that ostensibly "rely on military, police or administrative and legal actions and entirely exclude the elimination of the social causes of drug production."³¹ Russian efforts in the region that have actually materialized include intelligence sharing and joint operations with Nicaragua and Peru, as well as a new Russian counter-narcotics center in Managua.³²

Farah claims that the purpose of that training center is to supplant U.S. counter-drug initiatives in the region.³³ Yet, U.S. officials reportedly do not see Russia's counter-narcotics activities in the region as counter to U.S. efforts. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement William Brownfield has welcomed Russia's contributions in the collaborative effort against globalized narcotics trafficking, reportedly saying, "The truth is that we want collaboration, and if the collaboration comes from Russia in our hemisphere or if it's the United States in Russia's hemisphere, then I think that is positive."³⁴ Nevertheless, Pamela Izaguirre and Darya Vakulenko indicate that "Russian assistance to Nicaragua...is evidence of its rebirth as a diplomatic force in Latin America."³⁵

²⁹ Lyubov Lyulko, "Russia Offers Latin America to Combat Drugs Together," *Pravda*, March 12, 2012, http://www.pravdareport.com/russia/economics/12-03-2012/120748-russia_latin_america_drugs-0/.

³⁰ Marshall, *From Drug War to Culture War*, 16.

³¹ Lyulko, "Russia Offers Latin America to Combat Drugs Together."

³² Ellis, "Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean," 5.

³³ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, House of Representatives*, 114th Cong., 9 (October 22, 2015) (statement of Douglas Farah, President, IBI Consultants, LLC), <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA07/20151022/104073/HHRG-114-FA07-Transcript-20151022.pdf>.

³⁴ Tim Rogers, "U.S. Welcomes Russian Support for Nicaragua's Drug War," *Nicaragua Dispatch*, March 31, 2013, <http://nicaraguadispatch.com/2013/03/us-welcomes-russian-support-for-nicaraguas-drug-war/>.

³⁵ Pamela F. Izaguirre and Darya Vakulenko, "Russia and Nicaragua: Working Together To Foil International Drug Trafficking," Council on Hemispheric Affairs, April 10, 2013, <http://www.coha.org/22213/>.

Farah also argues that the leaders of the Bolivarian states have allowed Russia and other extra-regional actors—namely China and Iran—as well as leaders of the Bolivarian states themselves, to supplant U.S. influence in Latin America. He contends that the U.S. government has decreased its engagement with Latin America dramatically since 2010, marked by significant decreases in civilian aid and security assistance to the region—thus creating a vacuum of influence.³⁶ Farah holds that the Bolivarian governments have endeavored to replace U.S. security doctrine with a “lethal doctrine of asymmetrical warfare, inspired by authoritarian governments.”³⁷ He mentions that the Bolivarian governments also regularly provide political support to states that act counter to U.S. interests including Russia with regard to its involvement in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea.³⁸ The Bolivarian leaders believe that Russia, China, and Iran are “natural allies of the Bolivarian Revolution.”³⁹

3. Yet, Russia Not Getting Too Close

Despite those geopolitical in-roads that Russia has made with the Bolivarian states, it reportedly does not desire to establish a relationship like it had with Cuba during the Cold War. It reportedly is not likely to go to war over a Latin American ally as the Soviet Union almost did in Cuba.⁴⁰ According to the literature, Russia exercises restraint so as to not provoke the United States too much. Ellis indicates, “Russian activities in the region openly aid anti-U.S. regimes and challenge U.S. positions and interests in the region. They do not, however, directly seek harm to the U.S., nor are sufficient in size or

³⁶ Douglas Farah, “The Advance of Radical Populist Doctrine in Latin America: How the Bolivarian Alliance is Remaking Militaries, Dismantling Democracy and Combatting the Empire,” *Prism* 5, no. 3 (2015): 91–92, http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-3/The_Advance_Of_Radical_Populist_Doctrine_in_Latin_America.pdf.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁰ Sánchez, “Russia and Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” 377; David R. Mares, *Latin America and the Illusion of Peace*, Adelphi Series 52, no. 429 (London: IISS, 2012), 77, <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/tadl20/52/429#.VeU2WHbn83G>.

scope to seriously undermine the U.S. position there.”⁴¹ Indeed, Sánchez Ramírez mentions Russia’s cautious stance in its relations with late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez; the Russian government avoided involving itself in Chávez’s effort to personally lead the anti-U.S. bloc in the region.⁴² Moreover, when Russia deployed the aforementioned flotilla to the Caribbean in 2008, it cut short the exercise that the flotilla conducted with the Venezuelan navy to preclude provoking the United States too much. Another example of Russian restraint is that during its Tu-160 bomber mission in the Caribbean that same year, Russia let the United States know that its bombers were not armed with nuclear weapons.⁴³ Overall, Russia’s demonstrated restraint supports W. Alejandro Sánchez’s contention in 2010 that “Moscow does not regard Latin America as vital or critical to its foreign policy.”⁴⁴ Instead, ties between Russia and Latin American states may be ephemeral and dependent on the U.S. stance in Russia’s backyard, as Sánchez Ramírez has contended.⁴⁵

Indeed, an argument in the literature is that Russia is mainly just trying to send a message to the United States that it is displeased with U.S. and NATO interference in Russia’s periphery. Ellis posits that Russia’s efforts to obtain access to support bases for its warships and bombers to operate in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, its patrols in the Caribbean since 2008, and its alleged interest in reopening the Lourdes signals intelligence facility in Cuba are “strategic moves designed to enhance Russian freedom of action in its own region by forcing a U.S. response. Such moves are, in part, the continuation of a strategic global ‘game’ that the Soviet Union played with the United States during the Cold War.”⁴⁶ During the 2008 Georgian conflict, amid diplomatic visits, Russia seemingly sent the aforementioned Tu-160 bombers and four-ship flotilla to

⁴¹ R. Evan Ellis, “Russia, Iran, and China in Latin America: Evaluating the Threat,” American Foreign Policy Council, no. 9 (December 2013): 7, <http://www.afpc.org/files/december2013.pdf>; see also: Blank, “Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences,” 15.

⁴² Sánchez Ramírez, “Is a New Climate of Confrontation,” 234.

⁴³ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 33.

⁴⁴ Sánchez, “Russia and Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” 367.

⁴⁵ Sánchez Ramírez, “Is a New Climate of Confrontation,” 241.

⁴⁶ Ellis, “Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean,” 2.

operate in the Caribbean as warnings that Russia could still project power in close proximity to the United States, as the latter was doing near Russia. The United States had deployed naval vessels to the Black Sea near Russia.⁴⁷ According to Sánchez Ramírez, the deployments were also in response to the U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) system in Europe and NATO's placement of bases closer to Russia.⁴⁸ Likewise, a flight of two Tu-160s to Venezuela and Nicaragua in 2013 appears to have been a reaction to further development of the BMD system and meant to intimidate the United States.⁴⁹ In 2014, Russian leaders ramped up diplomatic visits to the region and began declaring the aforementioned basing plans—ostensibly as a strategic warning in response to U.S. involvement in the Ukraine crisis.⁵⁰ Russia's messaging may also support its allies; in 2013, the Tu-160s breached Colombian airspace over waters claimed by Nicaragua.⁵¹

Sánchez refers to this dynamic as the “tit-for-tat syndrome.”⁵² He says, “Unlike in the Cold War, there is no major ideology guiding Russian foreign policy besides national greatness and gaining beachheads in a region where the United States has a historical sphere of influence, much as Washington has done in post-Soviet areas.”⁵³ Yet, according to Sánchez, the gaining of beachheads in Bolivarian states does not mean the Russian military is returning to Latin America; rather, it signifies that Russia would have ports and airfields to utilize for its trips to and exercises in the Caribbean, which would be an act of “‘soft’ defiance” by states in the region against U.S. military supremacy in the hemisphere.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Ellis, “Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean,” 2.

⁴⁸ Sánchez Ramírez, “Is a New Climate of Confrontation,” 231.

⁴⁹ Stephen Blank, “The Latest Round of Russian Intimidation,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10, no. 207, November 18, 2013, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41642#.VeVF4Xbn83E.

⁵⁰ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

⁵² Sánchez, “Russia and Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” 365.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 376.

4. Commercial Ties, Arms Sales, Energy as Important

Contrary to the aforementioned position that Russia does not care much about economic ties with Latin America, there is the position that both Russia and Latin American states are concerned about economic ties in and of themselves. Sánchez recounts that some commentaries discuss the importance of Latin American sources of foodstuffs and other commodities to Russia, which, in turn, supplies them with technology-intensive products like vehicles and machinery.⁵⁵ José de Arimateia da Cruz indicates that Latin America's bountiful natural resources make cooperation with the region a Russian foreign policy priority—perhaps contrary to the aforementioned position that Latin America is not pivotal to Russian foreign policy.⁵⁶ Dmitri Trenin in 2007 contended that economic interests are more important to Russia than are geopolitical considerations, saying that “fluctuating energy prices, not nuclear warheads, are what really matter to Moscow.”⁵⁷ Yet, he did write that article before the Georgia crisis and Russia's military return to Latin America in 2008.

According to the literature, material gains are a driver for Latin American states' ties with Russia too. Blank says, “Nicaragua recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia to obtain Russian military and economic assistance to replace its aging arsenal of Soviet weapons....Cuba's continuing interest in strengthened ties with Russia stems from its endless need for assistance and is driven, at least partly, by its prior path of dependence upon Moscow and its economic largesse.”⁵⁸ Moreover, Venezuela came to rely on Russia for arms after the United States would no longer sell it parts for its F-16 aircraft.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Sánchez, “Russia and Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” 375.

⁵⁶ José de Arimateia da Cruz, “Strategic Insights: From Ideology to Geopolitics: Russian Interests in Latin America,” Strategic Studies Institute, March 24, 2015, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/From-Ideology-To-Geopolitics/2015/03/24#>.

⁵⁷ Dmitri Trenin, “Russia Redefines Itself and Its Relations with the West,” *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 95, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/wq/summary/v030/30.2trenin.html>.

⁵⁸ Blank, “Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences,” 3.

⁵⁹ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 32.

5. Limited Resources and Other Limitations

Regardless of whether Russia's reengagement with Latin American states is more geopolitically or economically motivated, Russian economic woes seem to be a hindrance to deeper relations between Russia and Latin American states. Blank, speaking in 2010 of the impacts of the Global Financial Crisis, said, "while Russia will continue expanding its ties to Latin America, Russia's capacities for deep involvement are less than it wants, as is Latin American states' ability to support Russian goals....Thus, Russia will only partially, if at all, meet Latin American expectations for support, even in stricken economies like Cuba."⁶⁰ Likewise, Ellis contends, contrary to Farah and Reyes, that ongoing low oil prices, as well as economic sanctions against Russia since 2014, are likely to inhibit Russia's investment in Latin America for arms purchases and energy and mining projects.⁶¹ According to Ellis, resource constraints have limited Russia's engagement to three groups: former Soviet allies Cuba and Nicaragua, other states such as Venezuela that will risk developing ties with Russia counter to U.S. influence, and other states with which Russia has a vested interest in furthering economic ties—namely Brazil, Peru, and Argentina.⁶²

Yet, Russia has faced limitations even with those states. It has had to counter resentment by the Cuban regime for the perceived Soviet abandonment of Cuba.⁶³ Meanwhile, reemerging ties with Nicaragua have only taken place due to the return to power of President Ortega in 2007.⁶⁴ Sánchez argues that Russia establishing bases in either of those two countries or Venezuela is unlikely.⁶⁵ He notes that a Russian base would be seriously detrimental to Havana's efforts to improve its ties with Washington and that "the Nicaraguan government has stated that, while it seeks closer military

⁶⁰ Blank, "Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences," 2.

⁶¹ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 76–77.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 9–12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ W. Alejandro Sánchez, "Geosecurity 101: Washington and Moscow's Military Bases in Latin America," Council on Hemispheric Affairs Policy Memo 5, May 6, 2014, 5, <http://www.coha.org/geosecurity-101-washington-and-moscows-military-bases-in-latin-america/>.

cooperation with Moscow, a Russian military base in that Central American country is out of the question.”⁶⁶ The establishment of a foreign military base would breach both the Nicaraguan and the Venezuelan constitutions.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, opposition political victories in Venezuela and Argentina in late 2015 portend diminished relations between those countries and Russia. As a result of the December 2015 National Assembly elections in Venezuela, the “opposition parties now hold a supermajority and can frustrate much of the government’s agenda.”⁶⁸ Opposition leaders question the necessity of Venezuela spending exorbitantly on defense, as the country is in an economic crisis. Thus, any potential talks over further arms deals with Russia could be non-starters.⁶⁹ Ellis indicates that the opposition victory has rendered Venezuela an unreliable partner for Russia. Moreover, Ellis offers that Mauricio Macri’s victory in Argentina’s November 2015 presidential race portends an Argentine move “back toward a more balanced international engagement posture, rebuilding relationships with Brazil and the United States that were badly damaged during the Kirchner era, and moving the nation away from its embrace of Russia and China.”⁷⁰

6. Summary of Mixed Messages in Literature

Based on themes in the literature, one sees a few mixed messages. A definite mixed message is whether geopolitical or material considerations are Russia’s primary concern vis-à-vis the region. Another inconsistency entails whether or not Latin America is pivotal to Russian foreign policy and thus whether Russian ties with the region will be ephemeral or enduring. Finally, different opinions exist on whether lower oil prices will limit Russia’s involvement in Latin America.

⁶⁶ Sánchez, “Geosecurity 101,” 5.

⁶⁷ Ramiro Sebastián Fúnez, “Russia’s Military Power in Latin America,” *Americas Quarterly* (blog), March 11, 2014, <http://americasquarterly.org/content/russia-military-power-in-latin-america>.

⁶⁸ David R. Sands, “Venezuela Vote May Doom Lucrative Russian Arms Deals,” *Washington Times*, December 9, 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/dec/9/venezuela-vote-may-doom-russian-arms-deals/>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ R. Evan Ellis, “Russian Influence in Latin America,” *The Cypher Brief*, January 5, 2016, <http://www.thecypherbrief.com/article/russian-influence-latin-america>.

D. HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: Contemporary Russia's engagement with former Soviet allies does not represent a return of the Soviet "bear" to the U.S. periphery. Russia's military and economic support to FSLN-led Nicaragua and the Castro regime in Cuba are much less significant than the ties the Soviet Union had with those regimes. The closeness of ties between Russia and former Soviet allies in the region predominately entails mutual political support and a limited Russian military/security presence. This hypothesis contrasts with Farah and Reyes's contention that contemporary Russia is more influential in the region than was the Soviet Union.⁷¹ This hypothesis supports the positions that Russia is engaging Latin America mostly for the geopolitical interests of challenging U.S. supremacy and demonstrating displeasure with U.S. activities in Russia's periphery.⁷² Thus, this hypothesis may support Sánchez Ramírez's statement that "ties between Latin America and Russia will be only temporary and will depend on the position that the United States takes toward Russia."⁷³

Hypothesis 2: Although material ties between Russia and former Soviet allies in Latin America are relatively insignificant and strategic ties like Russian deployments and basing talks seem fleeting, their ties may actually be more enduring—versus ephemeral—in limited areas such as counter-narcotics cooperation and relief of Soviet-era debts. As Russia may be undertaking these ties to boost its influence, this hypothesis does not contradict the position that these ties are meant to challenge U.S. supremacy.

Hypothesis 3: Russia's ties with Nicaragua today are greater than its ties with Cuba due to Cuban resentment of Soviet abandonment. According to Blank, Russia may be turning toward closer ties with Nicaragua as its strategic partner of choice in the

⁷¹ Farah and Reyes, "Russia in Latin America: The Strategic Challenge," 1–2.

⁷² Blank and Kim, "Russia and Latin America," 160, 169; Ellis, "Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean," 2.

⁷³ Sánchez Ramírez, "Is a New Climate of Confrontation," 241.

region.⁷⁴ Resentment over Soviet abandonment seems to have been a roadblock in the way of Russia's reengagement with former allies, especially Cuba.⁷⁵

Hypothesis 4: Russia's economic ties with Nicaragua and Cuba have declined since 2014 due to such factors as the downturn of the oil market and the economic sanctions against Russia. This hypothesis aligns with Ellis's contention that low oil prices and the sanctions against Russia are likely to inhibit Russia's investment in Latin America for arms purchases and energy and mining projects.⁷⁶

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis compares the political, security, and economic ties that FSLN-led Nicaragua and Castro-led Cuba had with the Soviet Union during the Cold War to the ties those same Latin American regimes have had with Russia in the contemporary era. This study analyzes the extent to which Russia's reengagement with former Soviet allies portends a return of Soviet era-like relations, as well as whether ties with contemporary Russia are consistent between the two cases. Not explored in this thesis are case studies of Russia's relations with Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, and other countries with which Russia has had significant ties in the contemporary era. Venezuela and Argentina's aforementioned political uncertainty renders them tenuous case studies to examine at this time. Chapters II and III of this thesis are case studies for Soviet and Russian ties with Nicaragua and Cuba, respectively. Chapter IV addresses the analysis of the hypotheses and implications for U.S. policy.

⁷⁴ Stephen Blank, "Nicaragua: Moscow's 'Second Front'," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11, no. 82, May 2, 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42305#.VeU-Nnbn83E.

⁷⁵ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76–77.

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II. NICARAGUAN-RUSSIAN TIES

As noted in the previous chapter, this thesis seeks to assess the ties between contemporary Russia and former Soviet allies in Latin America and to discuss the implications of those ties for U.S. policy. The case of Nicaragua supports the argument that Russian engagement with former Soviet allies today does not mean that the United States' Cold War-era adversary has made a comeback in the region. This chapter first examines Nicaragua's ties with the Soviet Union during Ortega's first period of rule from 1979 to 1990 and then assesses Nicaragua's ties with Russia during Ortega's ongoing rule since 2007; for each period, the thesis assesses the closeness of bilateral political, security, and economic ties.

A. SOVIET-NICARAGUAN TIES IN THE COLD WAR

Latin America was not a priority for the Soviets for most of the twentieth century. After the Soviet Union's establishment, it developed ties to some extent with leftists and revolutionaries in the region, but it was not until the success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 that the Soviets took an interest in the region as a place for advancing communism and gaining a strategic foothold vis-à-vis the United States.⁷⁷ Ellis says that Fidel Castro's success "showed the Soviet Union the potential for leftist movements and others supportive of the USSR to come to power by force in Latin America and the Caribbean. Driven in part by such new optimism...the USSR began to develop important centers of Latin American studies."⁷⁸ Nonetheless, "the Soviets also discouraged the small orthodox Communist parties from engaging in violence and were reluctant to support leftist groups advocating revolution."⁷⁹ For instance, the Soviets were largely unwilling to provide

⁷⁷ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 4–5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁹ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Special National Intelligence Estimate 11/80/90-82, CIA Historical Review Program (Washington, DC: CIA, June 25, 1982), 6, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/17/19820625.pdf.

material support to Jamaica's Michael Manley in the 1970s.⁸⁰ Instead, the Cubans took the lead with overt military support to such leftists—as the Cubans had done in Africa.⁸¹

The Soviet Union did not start serious engagement with Nicaragua until after the FSLN rebels' victory in 1979. Nicaragua and the Soviet Union had established diplomatic relations with each other during World War II, when the Soviets were allies of the United States. Nonetheless, for most of the Cold War, the Soviets were not interested in engaging Central American countries because their leaders were anti-communist.⁸² Local Communists in Central America and beyond had come into disrepute, first due to the Stalin-Hitler agreement of 1939 and later due to Soviet guidance that Communists seek compromise with their countries' dictators.⁸³ Moreover, as Marc Edelman states, "For the most part, Soviet analysts writing before 1979 believed Nicaragua to be one of the places in Latin America (if not the place) where U.S. domination was strongest."⁸⁴

Indeed, up until the FSLN-led revolution in the late 1970s, the United States maintained a very strong foothold in Nicaragua. The U.S. military occupied Nicaragua for the majority of two decades starting in 1912. U.S. troops withdrew by 1932 after a stalemate with the forces of rebel leader Augusto C. Sandino. While occupying Nicaragua, the United States had compelled Nicaragua to establish its National Guard. Under the command of Anastasio Somoza García, the National Guard killed Sandino and took control of Nicaragua. Somoza and his two sons—in succession—led Nicaragua as dictators from 1936 until 1979. The Somozas were staunchly pro-U.S. and were thus "anti-Axis" and subsequently "anti-Communist."⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 6.

⁸¹ Ibid.; Robert F. Miller, *Soviet Foreign Policy Today* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991), 151, <http://www.tandfebooks.com/isbn/9780203168806>.

⁸² Danuta Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America, 1979-90* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 9, <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doi/10.1057/9780230289000>.

⁸³ John A. Booth, Christine J. Wade, and Thomas W. Walker, *Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change*, 6th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015), 287.

⁸⁴ Marc Edelman, "Soviet-Nicaraguan Relations and the Contra War," *International Journal on World Peace* 5, no. 3 (July 1988): 48, ProQuest (1311295479).

⁸⁵ Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 99.

1. The Revolution and the Superpowers

As the revolution unfolded in the late 1970s, the Sandinistas were not yet in league with the Soviet Union; the Soviets had little interest in the revolution.⁸⁶ Contemporary analysts such as those at Stratfor would have one believe that the Soviets supported the revolution and enabled the FSLN to come to power.⁸⁷ To the contrary, according to Danuta Paszyn, “There is convincing evidence that the Soviet Union played no active role in nor gave any direct material assistance to the guerrilla war in Nicaragua. However, it has been alleged that the Sandinistas received some support in the form of training, weapons and limited financial aid from their friend and ally, Cuba.”⁸⁸ The Soviets saw the revolution as unlikely to succeed, and even the local Soviet-affiliated *Partido Socialista Nicaragüense* (PSN) did not join the Sandinistas until shortly before they emerged victorious in 1979.⁸⁹ The PSN’s position—as reportedly related in PSN member Carlos Fonseca’s 1958 book *Un Nicaragüense en Moscú* [A Nicaraguan in Moscow]—had been “that Nicaragua needed not a revolutionary transformation but a long process of reform.”⁹⁰ It was not until the Sandinista victory seemed promising that the Soviets began to take an interest in the Nicaraguan revolution.⁹¹

After taking power in 1979, the FSLN initially desired to maintain relations with the United States, but with reduced U.S. influence in Nicaragua’s affairs.⁹² Indeed, “in 1979 and 1980 the Sandinistas had fairly good working relations with the United States but warily regarded U.S. links to several thousand National Guardsmen who had escaped to Honduras and the United States.”⁹³ During the late 1970s, ties between the United States and the Somoza regime had become strained to some extent, as the Carter

⁸⁶ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 25.

⁸⁷ “Ortega’s Cold War Memories?,” Stratfor, September 3, 2008, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/nicaragua-ortegas-cold-war-memories>.

⁸⁸ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 25.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁹⁰ Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 47.

⁹¹ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 1.

⁹² Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 35.

⁹³ Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 106.

administration and Congress withheld military aid due to allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Nicaraguan National Guard.⁹⁴ After the FSLN took power, the Carter administration offered the nascent regime diplomatic recognition and aid including a \$75 million loan.⁹⁵ Western Europe provided even more aid.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, when President Reagan came to power in 1981, the tables turned. His administration immediately labeled the Sandinistas as Marxist-Leninists and considered them to be in league with the Soviet Union in its plot to subvert democratic governments.⁹⁷ Paszyn says, “The Nicaraguan revolution and the growing revolutionary tide in neighbouring states of Central America, notably El Salvador and Guatemala, were viewed by Reagan and his advisers in an East-West context instead of indigenous and North-South contexts.”⁹⁸ By August 1981, the U.S. military and the CIA began funding the counter-revolutionary Contras for their operations against the FSLN regime; then, the CIA itself began directing operations against the regime as well. These operations, as well as economic and political coercion from the Reagan administration, took a toll on Nicaragua’s economy and cost thousands of lives.⁹⁹

2. The Soviet Bloc Helps the New Regime

With the United States working to counter the FSLN regime, the Soviet Union subsequently escalated its support for the regime—doing so to counter U.S. efforts, rather than to prop up a socialist regime. Paszyn argues “that the Soviet Union did not intend to establish socialism in Nicaragua or a second ‘Cuba,’ nor to promote a social revolutionary change in El Salvador and Guatemala, but merely to cause problems for the United States.”¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Jaime Suchlicki wrote, “While communization of Latin

⁹⁴ Martha L. Cottam, *Images and Intervention: U.S. Policies in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1994), 88–90.

⁹⁵ Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 106.

⁹⁶ Thomas E. Skidmore, Peter H. Smith, and James N. Green, *Modern Latin America*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 102.

⁹⁷ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 42.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

America may be a long-term, and probably far-off, aspiration, the immediate objective of the Soviet Union is to facilitate any developments which promise to weaken U.S. ties with, or even to isolate the U.S. from, its present Latin American supporters.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, by the latter period of Leonid Brezhnev’s administration in the early 1980s, the Soviet Union had prioritized pragmatism over shared socialist ideology in its relations with Third World regimes, in light of its faltering economy. As such, the Soviets provided only the near-term support that Nicaragua needed to ensure its economic viability and sovereignty in the face of U.S. antagonism.¹⁰² Paszyn says, “Moscow repeatedly made it clear that it would not underwrite the economic and financial costs of the revolution as it had done in Cuba, but as U.S. hostility increased so did the Soviet Union’s commitment.”¹⁰³

Indeed, the Soviet Union did progressively increase its support to the FSLN regime as the following three sub-sections detail about Soviet political, military, and economic support to the FSLN regime; but the Soviet government “moved in ways designed to avoid directly provoking the United States.”¹⁰⁴ While the Cubans provided material support to the regime ahead of the Soviets, the Soviets eventually provided most of the material support and direction.¹⁰⁵ The Soviet Union relied on intermediaries—mostly the Cubans—to deliver most of its support, so as to not provoke a reaction from the United States against the Soviet Union and to avoid damaging Soviet relations with other states in the region.¹⁰⁶

a. Political Ties

Analysts like those at Stratfor seemingly take a Reagan-esque view on the ideological ties between the Soviet Union and the FSLN regime. Fred Burton and Scott

¹⁰¹ Jaime Suchlicki, “Soviet Policy in Latin America: Implications for the United States,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/165638>.

¹⁰² Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 55, 116–17.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰⁴ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 119.

¹⁰⁶ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 8, 10.

Stewart at Stratfor mention, “There has always been a tight relationship between the Marxist FSLN and its ideological brethren and patrons in places like Cuba and the Soviet Union.”¹⁰⁷ To the contrary, the FSLN was not simply a Marxist organization. Its ideology was a blend of Marxism, nationalism, liberation theology, and liberalism.¹⁰⁸ Martha Cottam adds, “*Sandinismo*, not a clearly defined ideology, was imbued with nationalism and attention to national ills. It called for social and economic justice, democracy, agrarian reform, and a mixed public-private economy.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, the FLSN’s goal was to implement its own unique form of socialism.¹¹⁰

Regardless, the Soviet Union did establish political ties with the FSLN regime. In 1980, the Soviets recognized “the FSLN as the vanguard and leading force in the Nicaraguan revolution, a role traditionally ascribed to Communist parties.”¹¹¹ Indeed, the PSN had only a minor role in the new government.¹¹² In 1980, the Soviets opened a diplomatic mission in Managua. By 1982, the Nicaraguan foreign and defense ministers, the FSLN political commission chairman, and even the FSLN military junta head—and later president—Daniel Ortega all visited Moscow.¹¹³

Nevertheless, neither the Soviet Union nor the FSLN regime was fully politically committed to the other. Despite Soviet recognition of the regime, “the heterodox nature of *Sandinismo* and the revolution itself made it difficult for the Soviets to make any major commitment to Nicaragua. Moreover, the Soviets did not seem to see that objective conditions necessary for the transition to socialism were existent there.”¹¹⁴ Thus, the

¹⁰⁷ Fred Burton and Scott Stewart, “Nicaragua: The Inherent Dangers of Being a Militant Mecca,” Stratfor, June 25, 2008, https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/nicaragua_inherent_dangers_being_militant_mecca.

¹⁰⁸ Shelley A. McConnell, “Nicaragua’s Pacted Democracy,” in *In the Wake of War Democratization and Internal Armed Conflict in Latin America*, ed. Cynthia J. Arnson (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012), 141.

¹⁰⁹ Cottam, *Images and Intervention*, 88–89.

¹¹⁰ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 33.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹² Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 287.

¹¹³ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 8–9.

¹¹⁴ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 54.

Soviets refrained from labeling Nicaragua as “socialist” to avoid fully committing itself to the nascent revolutionary regime. As mentioned, the Soviets did not want to shoulder another Cuba in the Western Hemisphere. They actually encouraged Nicaragua to diversify its international relations instead of relying solely on the Soviet bloc.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Nicaragua did diversify its diplomatic and economic ties, even with a number of non-Communist countries including Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, France, and Spain. Moreover, in the early 1980s, Nicaragua did not always side with the Soviet Union on significant votes in the United Nations (UN), though it did often vote the same as the Soviet Union and contrary to the United States.¹¹⁶

b. Security Ties

After the revolution, the FSLN regime turned to the Soviet bloc for arms, in light of the effective U.S. drive to keep its allies from selling Nicaragua weapons. The Soviets did begin providing weapons to the regime, but they did so in such a way as to not provoke backlash from the United States. As such, the Soviet weapons provided were purportedly more defensive in nature. Notably, the Soviets turned down FSLN requests for MiG fighter aircraft, with which the regime could potentially threaten other states in the region. Moreover, as mentioned, the Soviets used intermediaries—namely the Cubans, East Germans, and North Koreans—to sell or deliver arms to Nicaragua.¹¹⁷ Besides those Communist partners, the Soviets called upon Libya and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to assist the Nicaraguans.¹¹⁸ Starting in the early 1980s, a number of Soviet towed artillery guns, multiple-rocket launchers (MRLs), armored personnel carriers, amphibious vehicles, Mi-8 “Hip” transport helicopters, and anti-aircraft artillery guns made their way to the Nicaraguan regime. Meanwhile, Bulgaria delivered amphibious vehicles, North Korea delivered MRLs, and Libya exported about

¹¹⁵ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 31.

¹¹⁶ Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 288–89.

¹¹⁷ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 46.

¹¹⁸ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 9.

100 SA-7 man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) and reportedly even a pair of SA-8 vehicle-mounted surface-to-air missile systems.¹¹⁹

Military aid from the Soviets and the other Communist and radical governments truly intensified in 1984.¹²⁰ The regime still did not receive MiG fighters, but “by the end of 1984 Nicaragua had the heavy military equipment that it needed not only to eliminate the Contra threat in the near future but also to increase military costs to the United States, if invaded.”¹²¹ That year, the Soviets provided Nicaragua its first set of eight Mi-24 “Hind” attack helicopters, several older-model tanks, and approximately 1,500 SA-7 MANPADS.¹²² Moreover, as a first, the Soviets shipped the Mi-24s in their inaugural direct shipment of weapons to Nicaragua, as opposed to sending them through an intermediary such as Cuba. The CIA assessed that the Soviets did so to more directly strengthen the FSLN government after Nicaraguan leaders visited Russia in 1984.¹²³

In 1986 and 1987, Soviet arms deliveries again intensified. Paszyn indicates that the Soviets did so in response to ramped-up U.S. rhetoric and military actions in Central America.¹²⁴ The Nicaraguan regime received further shipments of Mi-24 attack helicopters, a small fleet of fixed-wing transport aircraft, and hundreds of SA-14 and SA-16 MANPADS—more advanced than their existing SA-7s. Moreover, they continued to receive tanks, amphibious vehicles, and transport helicopters, but still no MiG fighter aircraft.¹²⁵ Thus, ostensibly, “Nicaragua’s military posture remained defensive and unsuited to any offensive actions against its neighbours, despite its military build-up and weapons purchases from the Soviet bloc.”¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/armstransfers>.

¹²⁰ Director of Central Intelligence, *Nicaragua: Soviet Bloc and Radical Support for the Sandinista Regime*, Special National Intelligence Estimate 83.3-3-85, CIA Historical Review Program (Washington, DC: CIA, March 1985), 3, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/document/0000681978>.

¹²¹ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 51.

¹²² Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

¹²³ Director of Central Intelligence, *Nicaragua: Soviet Bloc and Radical Support*, 5, 7.

¹²⁴ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 79.

¹²⁵ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

¹²⁶ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 79.

In addition to the Soviet Union's usual attempts at obscuring its involvement in arms shipments to Nicaragua, Soviet personnel involvement was also discreet. For comparison, by 1982, Cuban military and security personnel in Nicaragua numbered over 2,000, whereas only about 50 to 75 Soviet military personnel were there. Nonetheless, of those few Soviet personnel, several acted as advisers to the Nicaraguan General Staff and thus were involved in key planning.¹²⁷ Others assembled the delivered helicopters, while some did venture out to the combat areas as observers or evaluators. In contrast, Cuban personnel were more directly involved with operations; they flew helicopters in combat, kept up Nicaragua's RADAR sites, and assisted the Nicaraguans with signals intelligence collection and processing. By 1985, the number of Cuban military and security personnel had increased to between 2,500 and 3,500, while the number of personnel from the Soviet Union remained about the same as in 1982. Small numbers of security personnel from other European Communist countries, North Korea, Libya, and the PLO were also present—either as trainers or for intelligence support. Cuba also provided the vast majority of civilian technicians—about 3,500 to 4,000 in 1985—compared with 150 from the Soviet Union and 200 from Eastern Europe. Cuba also hosted several hundred Nicaraguan military trainees by 1985, while the Soviet Union and other European Communist countries and North Korea hosted a few hundred as well. In a few of the countries including the Soviet Union, many Nicaraguan pilots trained to fly MiG fighters, which, as mentioned, the Soviets never gave them.¹²⁸

Regarding facilities, the Soviets seemingly did not establish a base in Nicaragua. They set up a medical facility at Chinandega in 1982, with a Soviet staff. Also, they may have assisted the FSLN regime and the Cubans with setting up four high-frequency/direction-finding (HF/DF) signals intelligence sites in Nicaragua in the early 1980s with Soviet HF/DF equipment.¹²⁹ Altogether, the Soviet military and security

¹²⁷ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 10.

¹²⁸ Director of Central Intelligence, *Nicaragua: Soviet Bloc and Radical Support*, 9–12.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13, 19–20.

presence in Nicaragua during the 1980s was seemingly restrained and plausibly done to keep the new regime afloat in response to U.S. antagonism.¹³⁰

c. Economic Ties

Like military assistance, significant economic assistance to the nascent FSLN regime was slow in coming from the Soviet Union. From 1979 to 1982, the Soviets only provided \$76 million worth of economic aid to the regime, whereas the United States provided it twice as much. As mentioned, the Soviet Union was hesitant to take on the burden of another dependency like Cuba, due to the Soviet economic downturn. As Nicaragua and the Soviet Union lacked complementarity between their economies, the Soviets encouraged the FSLN to maintain economic ties with the United States.¹³¹

Nevertheless, the Reagan administration's economic pressure on Nicaragua drove deeper Soviet economic assistance to it. Indeed, the Nicaraguans had limited options for assistance.¹³² Booth, et alia summarize it best, "U.S. pressures to curtail Western credit to and trade with Nicaragua forced increasing reliance on the Eastern bloc for credit, other aid, and trade in the mid-1980s."¹³³ In Reagan's first year, the United States reneged on a grain credit to Nicaragua; the Soviets responded with a donation of 20,000 tons of wheat. By 1983, the Soviet Union had become Nicaragua's top wheat provider.¹³⁴ Thereafter, Soviet economic assistance—like military assistance—increased significantly, as "Soviet-Nicaraguan ties developed proportionately, in response to the increasing U.S. hostility."¹³⁵ By the mid-1980s, aid from multilateral lenders like the World Bank had dried up. Meanwhile, the value of Soviet-Nicaraguan trade skyrocketed from 100,000 rubles in 1980 to 42 million rubles in 1983 and then grew five-fold from 1983 to 1985.¹³⁶ Total economic aid from Communist countries including the Soviet Union increased

¹³⁰ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 55.

¹³¹ Ibid., 38, 55.

¹³² Ibid., 38, 44.

¹³³ Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 112.

¹³⁴ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 43.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 51.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 53.

from about \$160 million in 1983 to \$220 million in 1984.¹³⁷ In 1985, Gorbachev further increased economic support to Nicaragua, after the United States emplaced a trade embargo against it.¹³⁸ Thereafter, Soviet oil deliveries, which had increased six-fold from 1983 to 1984, began to fulfill 80 percent of Nicaragua's oil requirements.¹³⁹

Nonetheless, as with political ties and military assistance, the Soviets still preferred a more discreet and non-committed economic relationship. While Gorbachev increased assistance to Nicaragua in 1985, he was careful, according to Paszyn, to avoid "furthering any special relationship that could mean new heavy investments, which the Soviets wished to avoid for both economic and political reasons. Any dramatic increase in the Soviet presence in Nicaragua would have given fresh credibility to the arguments put forward by the hostile Reagan administration."¹⁴⁰ Tellingly, in 1985, the Soviet Union and Eastern European Communist countries denied Nicaragua's requests for full membership in their Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON).¹⁴¹ By 1987, the Soviet Union began to really show its inability to commit economically to Nicaragua; that year, it significantly decreased its oil provision—meeting only about half of Nicaragua's demand.¹⁴²

3. The Soviet Union Curbs Its Support to the FSLN

In the late 1980s, Soviet support to the FSLN regime declined. Paszyn notes, "With the introduction of Gorbachev's policy of 'new thinking' in 1985, Moscow's advocacy for a peaceful settlement to the Central American crisis became more pronounced."¹⁴³ Shortly before the U.S. presidential election in 1988, the Soviets decided "to suspend temporarily the delivery of heavy weapons to Nicaragua and, also, to limit

¹³⁷ Director of Central Intelligence, *Nicaragua: Soviet Bloc and Radical Support*, 3.

¹³⁸ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 76.

¹³⁹ Director of Central Intelligence, *Nicaragua: Soviet Bloc and Radical Support*, 14; Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 80.

¹⁴⁰ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 76.

¹⁴¹ Director of Central Intelligence, "CEMA-Nicaragua: Increasing Aid," *National Intelligence Daily*, October 29, 1985, CIA Historical Review Program, 4, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/document/0005500164>.

¹⁴² Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 80.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95.

the deliveries of light weapons.”¹⁴⁴ Ostensibly, they did so because the United States had suspended military aid to the Contras earlier in the year and also wanted to influence the new administration’s policy approach toward Nicaragua. Furthermore, the Soviets insisted that the Cubans and the FSLN regime stop supplying arms to any group in Latin America, though both continued providing arms to guerrillas in El Salvador in 1989.¹⁴⁵

The Soviet foreign ministry desired to reach settlements to the conflicts in the region, in favor of Soviet interests as opposed to those of foreign ideologues like Castro. By 1989, Gorbachev began cooperating with President George H.W. Bush to resolve the conflicts, moved to develop diplomatic relations with all Central American governments including that of El Salvador, and stopped consulting Castro on such matters.¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile, in Nicaragua and other Third World countries such as Vietnam, Gorbachev encouraged “‘national reconciliation’ under which pro-Soviet, ‘vanguard-party’-ruled countries involved in armed conflicts with Western-assisted anti-communist movements...form governments of national unity with their enemies.”¹⁴⁷ Since Communist rule had already ended in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany by late 1989, the Soviets showed that they would tolerate the demise of such Third World regimes as the FSLN regime if such demise occurred due to loss in democratic elections. Indeed, after Ortega lost to opposition candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro in the Soviet- and Western-demanded free election of February 1990, the Soviets level-headedly recognized her victory and extended economic assistance to her administration.¹⁴⁸

B. CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN-NICARAGUAN TIES

Post-Cold War Russia seemingly began to seek political influence in Latin America in 1996. As mentioned, Russian Foreign Minister Primakov began visiting Latin American states in 1996 and 1997. Whereas he did visit Cuba, he did not visit

¹⁴⁴ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 81.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 81, 119.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 81–83.

¹⁴⁷ Miller, *Soviet Foreign Policy Today*, 155.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 129, 155.

Nicaragua.¹⁴⁹ During the decade that followed, foreign policy under the Nicaraguan administrations of Arnaldo Alemán and Enrique Bolaños emphasized cordial relations with the United States.¹⁵⁰

1. Political Ties Resume under Ortega

It was not until Ortega's 2007 return to power as elected president that political ties between Russia and Nicaragua strengthened. Ortega resumed the ties with Russia that had dwindled after the latter withdrew from the region in 1989 and the FSLN's subsequent defeat in Nicaragua's 1990 presidential election. As proof of strengthened political ties between the two countries after Ortega's return, Nicaragua was one of only a very few states besides Russia—and the first in Latin America, before Venezuela—to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after they broke away from Georgia in 2008; Nicaragua recognized them without being asked to do so.¹⁵¹

a. Engagement for Economic Aid or to Counter U.S. Influence

The Ortega administration may have made this grand political overture to secure military equipment and economic support from Russia.¹⁵² Blank and Kim mention that “Ortega claimed that he was turning to Russia, just as he had done a generation ago, because Washington offered nothing to Nicaragua despite requests for military and other aid.”¹⁵³ Indeed, aid from and diplomatic relations with Russia resumed after Nicaragua's recognition of the breakaway Georgian provinces in early September 2008.¹⁵⁴ That same month, Russia made an immense political overture in return with a visit by then Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin to Managua.¹⁵⁵ Although no longer in the government at

¹⁴⁹ Gvosdev and Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 376.

¹⁵⁰ “External Affairs, Nicaragua,” *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Central America and the Caribbean*, updated October 13, 2015, 1, <https://janes.ihs.com/AirportHandlingCAC/Display/1302304>.

¹⁵¹ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 10, 25–26, 39–40.

¹⁵² Blank, “Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences,” 3.

¹⁵³ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 166.

¹⁵⁴ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 10.

¹⁵⁵ Mark A. Smith, “Russia & Latin America: Competition in Washington's ‘Near Abroad’?,” *Russian Series*, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom Research and Assessment Branch, April 2009, 14, <http://www.conflictstudies.org.uk/files/06.pdf>.

present, Sechin is President Putin's "left hand man," the head of oil giant Rosneft, and #47 on *Forbes*'s 2015 "World's Most Powerful People" list—on which Putin himself has garnered the #1 spot.¹⁵⁶ Thus, the fact of Sechin's visit to Nicaragua was significant. During the visit, he reportedly offered Nicaragua "economic, energy, infrastructure, and military assistance."¹⁵⁷ Diplomatic relations continued to increase in November 2008, when then Russian President Medvedev met with Ortega on the sidelines of the ALBA conference in Caracas, Venezuela.¹⁵⁸

Russian material assistance—as promised by Sechin—came to Nicaragua shortly thereafter. When the aforementioned Russian flotilla—including nuclear cruiser *Peter the Great* and destroyer *Admiral Chabanenko*—conducted the Russian navy's first surface action group deployment to Latin America since 1988 in November and December 2008, *Admiral Chabanenko* made a port visit to Nicaragua to deliver medical and office supplies and generators as humanitarian aid. Besides rewarding Ortega's political support, this move may have been a response to the U.S. Navy's delivery of humanitarian aid to Georgia in August 2008. The week after *Admiral Chabanenko's* visit, Ortega visited Moscow to discuss economic investment.¹⁵⁹

Though it could be that the Ortega administration has increased Nicaragua's political ties with Russia principally for the purpose of gaining Russian economic support, one cannot discount that Nicaragua is building relationships with countries with which the United States has had poor relations in order to diminish U.S. influence. *Jane's* comments that Ortega's Nicaragua "has been keen to build international alliances that will act as a counterweight to U.S. influence in its internal affairs, representing a marked shift away from the pro-U.S. tendencies of previous administrations in the 1990s and

¹⁵⁶ Kathryn Dill, ed., "The World's Most Powerful People," *Forbes*, November 4, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/igor-sechin/>.

¹⁵⁷ "External Affairs, Nicaragua," 13.

¹⁵⁸ Izaguirre and Vakulenko, "Russia and Nicaragua: Working Together."

¹⁵⁹ Dmitry Gorenburg, *Russian Naval Deployments: A Return to Global Power Projection or a Temporary Blip?* PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo 57 (May 2009), 2, 4–5, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/russian-naval-deployments-return-global-power-projection-or-temporary-blip>.

2000s.”¹⁶⁰ Ortega’s Nicaragua has befriended the regimes of not only Russia but also Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, and even Muammar Gaddafi’s Libya before the latter’s overthrow. Under Ortega, Nicaragua joined and became an ardent member of the Hugo Chávez-founded ALBA leftist bloc.¹⁶¹ The ALBA—or “Bolivarian”—states have been supportive of Russia and other states that counter U.S. interests; they have supported Russia with regard to its involvement in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea.¹⁶² They consider Russia, China, and Iran to be “natural allies of the Bolivarian Revolution.”¹⁶³ As such, Ortega has reportedly called Putin “brother president,” as did former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Ortega in 2012.¹⁶⁴

b. Not Ideological Ties but Political Support

The “brotherhood” between Ortega’s Nicaragua and Putin’s Russia is geopolitical versus ideological.¹⁶⁵ Today no shared ideology binds Putin’s Russia and Ortega’s regime because neither really has an ideological focus. While the FSLN from 1979 to 1990 was a “revolutionary mass-organic party...it was increasingly transformed into a personal vehicle for Daniel Ortega during its 16 years in opposition.”¹⁶⁶ During those years, the FSLN created pacts with Nicaraguan conservative politicians and became markedly less revolutionary. A number of Sandinista leaders defected, as the party became more of a “populist machine.”¹⁶⁷ The Sandinista defectors have indicated that Ortega’s party now “represents not Sandinista ideology but a new brand termed

¹⁶⁰ “External Affairs, Nicaragua,” 3.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3, 10.

¹⁶² Farah, “Advance of Radical Populist Doctrine in Latin America,” 93.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁶⁴ Cruz, “Strategic Insights”; *Fox News Latino*, “Iran Leader Watches Ortega Assume in Nicaragua as Nuclear Scientist Killed by Car Bomb,” January 11, 2012, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/01/11/ortega-takes-oath-for-3rd-term-as-nicaragua-leader/>.

¹⁶⁵ Cruz, “Strategic Insights.”

¹⁶⁶ Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts, “Latin America’s ‘Left Turn’: A Framework for Analysis,” in *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, ed. Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2011), 14.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

orteguismo.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, as Michael Shifter indicates, “ideology has for Ortega clearly taken a back seat to sheer power politics. He appears ready to do whatever is necessary to remain in power.”¹⁶⁹ Likewise, Putin has made his regime “a non-ideological one....Like any political regime, Putin’s Kremlin is doing its best to construct some collective identities and to exploit nationalist sentiments or Soviet nostalgia, but the insistence that you do not want to be lectured by the United States is not an ideology.”¹⁷⁰

Instead, Russia has geopolitical aims in its relations with Nicaragua and other states not in favor with the United States; one is the goal of achieving a multi-polar world order. According to Blank, a “craving for status lies at the heart of Russian foreign policy....It aims to instrumentalize Latin America as a series of countries or even a weak, but still discernible, political bloc to support Russian positions against U.S. policy and dominance in world affairs.”¹⁷¹ At the aforementioned 2008 ALBA conference, Medvedev openly solicited support for achieving a multi-polar world.¹⁷² That same month, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Nicaragua—as well as Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Ecuador—and promoted the importance of Latin America in developing multipolarity in international relations.¹⁷³ Moreover, when Sechin visited Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela in 2008, he reportedly proposed they form an “anti-American alliance” with Russia, in response to U.S. defense activities such as BMD system development in former Soviet republics.¹⁷⁴ Sechin’s proposal seems to align with the views of Aleksandr Dugin—preeminent Eurasianist scholar and author of *Foundations of Geopolitics*.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ Héctor Perla, Jr. and Héctor Cruz-Feliciano, “The Twenty-First-Century Left in El Salvador and Nicaragua: Understanding Apparent Contradictions and Criticisms,” *Latin American Perspectives* 40, no. 3 (May 2013): 99, <http://lap.sagepub.com/content/40/3/83.full>.

¹⁶⁹ Michael Shifter, “Central America’s Security Predicament,” *Current History* 110, no. 733 (February 2011): 54, ProQuest (851893749).

¹⁷⁰ Ivan Krastev, “Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism,” in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, 4th ed., ed. Patrick H. O’Neill and Ronald Rogowski (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013), 503.

¹⁷¹ Blank, “Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences,” 5.

¹⁷² Blank, “Russia in Latin America: Geopolitical Games,” 14.

¹⁷³ Smith, “Russia & Latin America,” 1, 3.

¹⁷⁴ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 163, 171.

¹⁷⁵ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 66.

Dugin has proposed that Russia win “over Europe for an anti-U.S. coalition” and “even mentions pulling Latin America from under U.S. influence.”¹⁷⁶ Sechin’s stated reason reveals Russia’s aim for multi-polarity is apparently a manifestation of the “tit-for-tat syndrome,” by which the Russians respond to U.S. encroachment in Russia’s historic backyard by doing the same to the United States.¹⁷⁷

Nicaragua has definitely been one to support that Russian aim. In December 2009, Ortega “pledged to Russia Nicaragua’s opposition to a ‘unipolar’ world and welcomed Russian presence in Latin America.”¹⁷⁸ During a visit to the region in March 2015, Lavrov thanked the Ortega administration for being instrumental in helping Russia make in-roads in the region, including with such regional associations as the Central American Integration System (SICA) and CELAC.¹⁷⁹ In April 2014, Lavrov visited Nicaragua—as well as Cuba, Chile, and Peru—in part to propose a Russia-CELAC visa-free travel agreement.¹⁸⁰ During his March 2015 tour, he met with senior leaders of the member states of SICA in Guatemala; afterward, the Guatemalan foreign minister announced that all of the Central American countries would strengthen their cooperation with Russia and that Russia would be filing for observer status in SICA.¹⁸¹ Russia ostensibly attempts to get involved with numerous regional associations to increase its great power status relative to that of the United States.¹⁸² As demonstrated with all of the aforementioned visits, Nicaragua has been a common denominator for Russia’s engagement in the region.

¹⁷⁶ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 67.

¹⁷⁷ Sánchez, “Russia and Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” 365.

¹⁷⁸ Blank, “Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences,” 5.

¹⁷⁹ Stephen Blank, “His Master’s Voice: Lavrov Tours Latin America,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12, no. 65, April 8, 2015, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=venezuela&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43765&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=814512d8a0ba328c9c2f0a32a97b3#.VdeDI3bn9fx.

¹⁸⁰ “Russia Pushes to Deepen Ties in Latin America,” *Stratfor*, April 30, 2014, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/russia-pushes-deepen-ties-latin-america#>.

¹⁸¹ “All Central American Nations Ready to Develop Cooperation with Russia — Minister,” TASS Russian News Agency, March 26, 2015, <http://tass.ru/en/russia/785244>.

¹⁸² Blank, “Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences,” 5.

Nicaragua has also been helpful in keeping Russia from international diplomatic isolation. During his July 2014 visit to the region for the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) summit in Brazil, Putin also visited Nicaragua, Cuba, and Argentina—showing that Russia is not cut off from international relations despite its involvement in Crimea and Ukraine but rather “is able to win both friends and influence—even in the United States’ own ‘backyard.’”¹⁸³ Diana Villiers Negroponte indicates that Russia is looking for allies that can “provide votes in Russia’s favor at the UN General Assembly.”¹⁸⁴ Nicaragua has done just that. Besides joining Russia in supporting the Georgian breakaway provinces, Nicaragua has voiced support for Russia’s policies and actions in Ukraine.¹⁸⁵ In March 2014, Nicaragua—alongside only 10 other countries including Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Syria, and North Korea—voted against the UN resolution affirming the sovereignty of Ukraine, whereas 100 countries supported it and 58 abstained.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, during Lavrov’s visit to Nicaragua that April, Ortega spoke out against sanctions the West emplaced against Russia.¹⁸⁷ In turn for such support from Nicaragua and other ALBA countries, Russia ostensibly provides them with “an influential friend on the United Nations Security Council.”¹⁸⁸

More significantly for Nicaragua, Russia supported Ortega’s electoral victory in 2006. The Russians reportedly were “helping his campaign and leveling accusations against U.S.-backed candidates.”¹⁸⁹ Moreover, upon his reelection in 2011, Russia was among the various countries—not including the United States—that recognized his

¹⁸³ Stephen Blank, “Vladimir Putin’s Latin American Tour,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11, no. 133, July 22, 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/regions/latinamerica/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42656&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=50&cHash=1e9e1d8a222d805898fa42405837944d#.VIIGr3bTk3F.

¹⁸⁴ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, House of Representatives*, 114th Cong., 38 (October 22, 2015) (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte, PhD, Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars).

¹⁸⁵ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 166.

¹⁸⁶ Tim Rogers, “Nicaragua Needs New Friends,” *Nicaragua Dispatch*, March 29, 2014, <http://nicaraguadispatch.com/2014/03/nicaragua-needs-new-friends/>.

¹⁸⁷ “Russia Pushes to Deepen Ties in Latin America.”

¹⁸⁸ Farah and Reyes, “Russia in Latin America: The Strategic Challenge,” 2.

¹⁸⁹ “Ortega’s Cold War Memories?”

victory right away despite opposition protests.¹⁹⁰ Now in his second term in this millennium, Ortega has had the Nicaraguan Supreme Court pass a ruling enabling him to run for a third term, despite it being unconstitutional.¹⁹¹ With Ortega securing his foothold, Russia may very well continue to have a stable and reliable ally in the region—which is especially significant for Russia in light of ongoing instability in Venezuela.¹⁹²

2. Security Ties

Since 2008, military engagements with Nicaragua have been a key facet of Russia's reengagement in Latin America.¹⁹³ In comparison with the discreet Soviet military involvement in Nicaragua in the 1980s, Russian involvement there in the contemporary era has been much less discreet. In September 2008 during the Georgia crisis, two Russian Tu-160 strategic, nuclear-capable bombers landed in Venezuela but did not visit Nicaragua.¹⁹⁴ As this trip occurred just days after Nicaragua's recognition Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence, perhaps Russia had not yet fully warmed up to Nicaragua. Regardless, within two weeks, the Russian ambassador to Nicaragua, Igor Kondrashev, announced on television that Russia would be modernizing Nicaragua's military hardware—most of which it received from the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, three months later—as mentioned—a Russian flotilla visited Nicaragua, as well as Venezuela and Cuba, as part of the Russian navy's first venture to the region since 1988.¹⁹⁶ Years later, in September 2013, two Russian navy vessels again visited Nicaragua, at Corinto on the Pacific Ocean, after first stopping in Cuba.¹⁹⁷ The following month, Russian Tu-160 bombers returned to the region and landed not only in Venezuela but also in

¹⁹⁰ Perla and Cruz-Feliciano, "The Twenty-First-Century Left," 91.

¹⁹¹ Mares, *Latin America and the Illusion of Peace*, 90.

¹⁹² Blank, "Nicaragua: Moscow's 'Second Front'."

¹⁹³ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 26–27.

¹⁹⁴ Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russian Strategic Bombers Touch Down in Latin America," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10, no. 200, November 7, 2013, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41598#.Vmd5lXbTk3E.

¹⁹⁵ Filadelfo Aleman, "Russia to modernize Nicaraguan military's arsenal," *USA Today*, September 24, 2008, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2008-09-24-2087638463_x.htm.

¹⁹⁶ Gorenburg, *Russian Naval Deployments*, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 27.

Nicaragua.¹⁹⁸ This trip was ostensibly part of Russia's reaction to growth of the U.S.-NATO BMD program in Eastern Europe.¹⁹⁹ The Tu-160s reportedly breached Colombian airspace over waters claimed by Nicaragua, which may have been a show of political support for Nicaragua.²⁰⁰ At the same time as the Tu-160 deployment, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev visited Managua. During the visit, he and the commander of Nicaragua's armed forces General Julio César Aviles Castillo signed an agreement to conduct regular consultations with each other.²⁰¹

a. Russia Unlikely to Have Bases in Nicaragua

Despite initial hype in 2014, Russia has seemingly not sought nor received rights to have a base of its own in Nicaragua. In February 2014, when U.S.-Russian relations were strained over the crisis in Ukraine, Russian leaders began announcing ostensible plans to establish basing rights to some extent in Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, and a few countries in Asia to support Russia's long-range bomber and naval deployments.²⁰² As mentioned, Sánchez has assessed that Russia is unlikely to establish a base in Nicaragua, noting that the latter's government has said that it "is out of the question."²⁰³ Indeed, the establishment of a foreign military base in Nicaragua would breach its constitution.²⁰⁴ After Russian Defense Minister Shoigu's follow-up visit to those three Latin American countries in February 2015, his deputy Anatoly Antonov clarified that Russia does not seek actual military bases but rather a series of locations for resupply, maintenance, and crew rest for their ships when deployed to the region and for their aircraft when flying missions there.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁸ Felgenhauer, "Russian Strategic Bombers Touch Down."

¹⁹⁹ Blank, "The Latest Round of Russian Intimidation."

²⁰⁰ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 27–28.

²⁰¹ "Russia and Nicaragua Sign Cooperation Memorandum," Interfax News Service, October 31, 2013, <http://interfax.com/newsinf.asp?id=455410>.

²⁰² Keck, "Russia Says It's Building Naval Bases"; Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 16, 28.

²⁰³ Sánchez, "Geosecurity 101," 5.

²⁰⁴ Fúnez, "Russia's Military Power in Latin America."

²⁰⁵ "Russia Has No Plans to Create Military Bases in Latin America."

Such maintenance depots would be useful for continued Russian deployments. In November 2014—amidst continued tensions over Ukraine—Shoigu had announced that Russian military aircraft would conduct recurring flights over the Caribbean and even over the Gulf of Mexico.²⁰⁶ To date, there have been no such further flights. Perhaps low oil prices since summer 2014 have hindered Russia's ability to do so, just as high oil prices in 2007 enabled Russia to resume its long-range bomber flights after a 15-year hiatus.²⁰⁷ Regardless, after Shoigu's February 2015 visit to Nicaragua, there was no mention of any agreement for additional basing rights for Russian bombers. Shoigu did, however, sign an agreement with the Nicaraguans that facilitates Russian navy visits to the ports of Corinto on the Pacific coast and Bluefields on the Caribbean coast.²⁰⁸

Airbase and port access aside, the Russian military has established a few new military facilities in Nicaragua, as the Soviet military did there in the 1980s. In April 2013, Russian Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Valery Gerasimov inaugurated a new munitions disposal facility there. Then, in June 2014, Russia established a facility for maintaining Nicaragua's ground force vehicles.²⁰⁹ Moreover, Russia reportedly gave Nicaragua \$26.5 million to build two military hospitals.²¹⁰

Meanwhile, Russian military presence for a few projects is potentially forthcoming. Russian troops may provide security for the construction of Nicaragua's Interoceanic Grand Canal. Construction reportedly commenced in December 2014.²¹¹ An agreement between Nicaragua and Russia was to permit Russian naval vessels and aircraft to deploy within Nicaragua's territorial waters during the first half of 2015 to

²⁰⁶ Gareth Jennings, "Russia to Extend Overflights to Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, November 13, 2014, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1728229>.

²⁰⁷ Matthew Bodner, "Russia Flying Its Strategic Bomber Fleet Seen as Global Intimidation Drive," *Moscow Times*, March 19, 2015, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/russia-s-strategic-bomber-fleet-on-global-intimidation-drive/517749.html>.

²⁰⁸ Ellis, "Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean," 1; *Sputnik News*, "Russia, Nicaragua Agree Simplified Port Entry Protocols for Russian Warships," February 12, 2015, <http://sptnkne.ws/7p>.

²⁰⁹ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 27–29.

²¹⁰ "Executive Summary, Nicaragua," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Central America and the Caribbean*, updated August 17, 2015, <https://janes.ihs.com/AirportHandlingCAC/Display/1302296>.

²¹¹ "Russia to Benefit from Guarding Nicaragua Canal if Allowed," *Sputnik News*, April 3, 2015, <http://sptnkne.ws/bxv>.

safeguard the canal's construction.²¹² Nonetheless, Russia has not yet been involved with providing security for the project. In April 2015, Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that Russia was prepared to do so but that the two governments had not yet outlined Russia's assistance.²¹³ Currently, construction on the canal is delayed. The Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Group, the private Chinese company commissioned with the project, announced in November 2015 that further construction would not proceed until late 2016.²¹⁴ If the project does proceed and Russia does eventually provide security for it, then—according to Blank and Kim—it reportedly may be permitted the “establishment of a military base” in Nicaragua for that purpose, which could give Russia “cover for the introduction of a host of covert agents and programs.... Thus, former government officials and opposition figures publicly have articulated their fears that Ortega might turn Nicaragua into a Russian base of operations.”²¹⁵

Another project that may increase Russian military presence in Nicaragua is the potential establishment of a satellite control station there for Russia's Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS). The Russian legislature has approved such a plan.²¹⁶ During Putin's July 2014 visit to the region, he reportedly argued for a GLONASS station in each country he visited.²¹⁷ Similar to Blank's theory about the canal project, he posits that the tracking station “will probably become a substitute for the electronic tracking center at Lourdes, Cuba, which Moscow gave up a decade ago.”²¹⁸

²¹² Yuri Paniyev, “Russia and Nicaragua to Cooperate on Construction of Interoceanic Canal,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, May 14, 2014, http://rbth.com/international/2014/05/14/russia_and_nicaragua_to_cooperate_on_construction_of_new_intero_36645.html.

²¹³ “Russia to Benefit from Guarding Nicaragua Canal if Allowed.”

²¹⁴ Jonathan Watts, “\$50bn Nicaragua Canal Postponed as Chinese Tycoon's Fortunes Falter,” *Guardian*, November 27, 2015, <http://gu.com/p/4etpy/sbl>.

²¹⁵ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 166.

²¹⁶ Blank, “Nicaragua: Moscow's ‘Second Front’.”

²¹⁷ Blank, “Vladimir Putin's Latin American Tour.”

²¹⁸ Blank, “Nicaragua: Moscow's ‘Second Front’.”

b. Counter-Narcotics Cooperation

More certain is Russia's counter-narcotics cooperation with Nicaragua. While Russian FSKN director Viktor Ivanov was touring Latin America in 2012—as mentioned in the previous chapter—he met with Nicaraguan officials to solicit cooperation with Russia to counter illicit drug trafficking.²¹⁹ Ivanov succeeded in signing an agreement with Nicaragua for technical assistance, information sharing, and operations coordination.²²⁰ Since then, counter-narcotics cooperation between Russia and Nicaragua has certainly had manifestations. In early March 2013, the Nicaraguans broke up a Zetas-affiliated drug trafficking network that had been shipping cocaine to Russia and Europe. The Russians reportedly contributed logistical support to the operation.²²¹ The operation resulted in 26 arrests and the seizure of about 1.2 tons of cocaine.²²² Later that month, Ivanov broke ground on the Russian-funded regional counter-narcotics training center in Managua.²²³ Russians have trained not only Nicaraguan police officers there but also officers from El Salvador and Guatemala.²²⁴ Reportedly, 130 Russian counter-narcotics instructors are permanently stationed there and conduct combined patrols with Nicaraguan officers. Farah contends that increases in Russian organized crime in Central America and drug trafficking from Central America to Russia have accompanied the increase in Russian state presence there. As mentioned earlier, he also claims that the purpose of the training center is to supplant U.S. counter-drug initiatives in the region.²²⁵

²¹⁹ Marshall, *From Drug War to Culture War*, 16.

²²⁰ James Bargent, “‘Zetas’ Network Trafficked Drugs from Nicaragua to Europe, Russia,” *Insight Crime*, March 12, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/zetas-network-trafficked-drugs-nicaragua-europe-russia>.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Miriam Wells, “Should Russian Anti-Drug Aid to LatAm Worry the US?,” *Insight Crime*, April 26, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/should-russian-drug-aid-latam-worry-us>.

²²³ Izaguirre and Vakulenko, “Russia and Nicaragua: Working Together.”

²²⁴ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, House of Representatives*, 114th Cong., 31 (October 22, 2015) (statement of Constantino Urcuyo-Fournier, PhD, Academic Director, Centro de Investigación y Adiestramiento Político, Administrativo in Costa Rica).

²²⁵ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 9, 11–12 (statement of Douglas Farah).

To the contrary, U.S. officials do not see Russia's counter-narcotics activities in Nicaragua as counter to U.S. efforts. Former U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua Phyllis Powers reportedly "underscored that the Russian counter-narcotic assistance to Central America was just a complementary collaboration to the work of the DEA in the country."²²⁶ The United States continues to support counter-narcotics efforts in Nicaragua with funding and information sharing. For example, in 2014, the United States funded 20 interdiction operations of the Nicaraguan National Police on the Pan-American Highway.²²⁷ That year, the United States also reportedly provided \$4 million toward "capacity-building projects" and donated equipment such as boats and thermal binoculars, while shifting some funding from direct support to the Nicaraguan government to indirect support through non-governmental programs due to accountability issues.²²⁸ For its part, Nicaragua is not choosing between its Russian and U.S. counter-narcotics partners, preferring instead to diversify its sources of assistance.²²⁹ Plus, in November 2013, Nicaragua invited both Russia and the United States—among others—to conduct counter-narcotics patrols in the waters around San Andrés Island that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had just awarded to Nicaragua instead of Colombia. Despite the political undertones of the invitation, one can see the invitation as valid due to the island being an emerging narcotics staging point.²³⁰

c. Military Equipment Modernization

That ICJ decision—which gives Nicaragua a larger exclusive economic zone to patrol—in addition to Nicaragua's other enduring territorial disputes, is guiding the country's efforts to procure major military hardware. Nevertheless, Nicaragua's budget is

²²⁶ Izaguirre and Vakulenko, "Russia and Nicaragua: Working Together."

²²⁷ U.S. Department of State Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *Drug and Chemical Control*. Vol. 1 of *2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Washington, DC: DOS, March 2015), 246, 248, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/239560.pdf>.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 249.

²²⁹ Izaguirre and Vakulenko, "Russia and Nicaragua: Working Together."

²³⁰ Charles Parkinson, "Nicaragua Issues Politically Charged Anti-Drug Ops Invitation," *Insight Crime*, November 27, 2013, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/4949-nicaragua-issues-politically-charged-anti-drug-ops-invitation?highlight=WyJuaWNhcmFndWEiLCJuaWNhcmFndWEncyJd>.

too limited, and plans for major purchases have fallen through or are unconfirmed. In February 2015 Nicaragua was reportedly in negotiations with Russia to purchase used MiG-29 “Fulcrum” fighter aircraft; yet, the following month Nicaraguan officials announced they were no longer seeking to procure the fighters—probably due to their inability to cover the high purchase and maintenance costs. Moreover, it is as of yet unconfirmed whether the Nicaraguan navy has ordered a pair of Molniya-class corvettes and four Mirach-class patrol boats from a Russian company.²³¹ Nicaragua has gained a few pieces of hardware for coastal patrol and counter-drug purposes. Spain donated four patrol vessels to the Nicaraguan Naval Force in 2007 for coastal patrol, while the United States underwrote the refurbishment of three Nicaraguan patrol boats in 2010. In 2009, Russia provided one of two Mi-17 transport helicopters that it offered to Nicaragua.²³² That Mi-17 is for counter-narcotics operations or possibly for transporting high-ranking officials.²³³

Meanwhile, Russia has assisted Nicaragua with modernizing its ground force equipment, to an extent. In fulfillment of its aforementioned September 2008 promise, Russia has reportedly assisted Nicaragua with its efforts to refurbish its Soviet-era artillery and armored vehicles. Moreover, by 2014, Russia had reportedly transferred to Nicaragua at least a small number of BTR-70M armored personnel carriers and BMP-1 light tanks.²³⁴ Nonetheless, one sees a distinct contrast between the vast amounts of military hardware that the Soviets provided to Nicaragua during the 1980s and the comparatively limited hardware that Russia has provided to Nicaragua in recent years.

3. Economic Ties

Russian economic aid to Nicaragua after the Soviet Union’s demise in 1991 was a significant reduction from the Soviet aid that had kept the FSLN regime afloat during the

²³¹ “Procurement, Nicaragua,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment – Central America and the Caribbean*, updated December 8, 2015, 1–4, <https://janes.ihs.com/AirportHandlingCAC/Display/1302313>.

²³² *Ibid.*, 3–4.

²³³ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

²³⁴ “Procurement, Nicaragua,” 2–3.

1980s.²³⁵ While Nicaragua's economy grew in the two decades after the Contra War, it remained reliant on foreign assistance.²³⁶ Reportedly, "decreasing remittances, capital flight and an unsustainable national budget led Ortega to seek aid from Russia."²³⁷

a. Resumption of Aid

Russian assistance resumed after Nicaragua's recognition of the Georgian breakaway provinces in September 2008.²³⁸ As mentioned, the Russian navy delivered a shipment of humanitarian assistance to Nicaragua in December 2008.²³⁹ Most significantly, Russia wrote off the \$3 billion of debt that Nicaragua had borrowed from the Soviet Union.²⁴⁰ During Sechin's return visit in July 2009, the two sides signed an agreement for visa-free travel, while Nicaraguan oil company Petronic signed a memorandum of understanding with the Russian National Oil Consortium for oil and energy cooperation.²⁴¹ Moreover, from 2011 until 2014, Russia was donating about 100,000 tons of flour annually and hundreds of public buses and taxis to Nicaragua.²⁴²

b. Increased but Tenuous Commerce

One can see in Figures 1 and 2 that after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008–2009, bilateral trade increased between Russia and Nicaragua. The aforementioned donated wheat and vehicles account for most of the increase in Nicaraguan imports from Russia from 2011 to 2013; fertilizer imports also increased markedly.²⁴³ By 2014,

²³⁵ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 6.

²³⁶ McConnell, "Nicaragua's Pacted Democracy," 154.

²³⁷ "Latin America," *Strategic Survey* 109, no. 1 (2009): 142, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/04597230903208639>.

²³⁸ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 10.

²³⁹ Gorenburg, *Russian Naval Deployments*, 2.

²⁴⁰ Izaguirre and Vakulenko, "Russia and Nicaragua: Working Together."

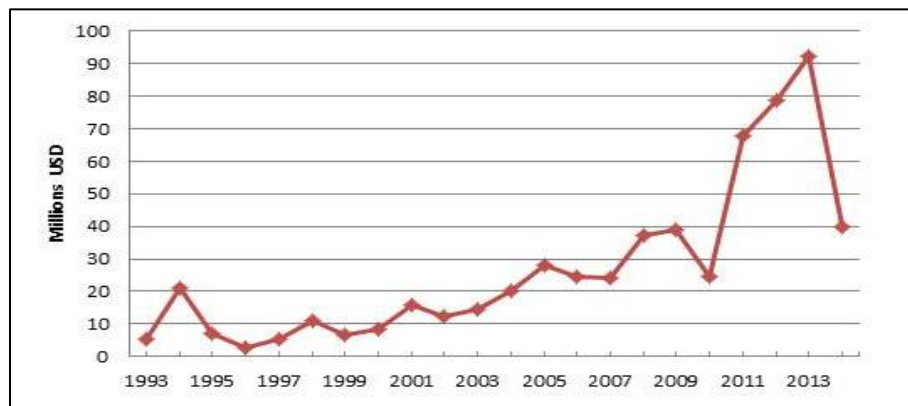
²⁴¹ "Russia, Nicaragua Sign Visa-Free Travel Agreement," *Sputnik News*, July 29, 2009, <http://sptnkne.ws/apXS>.

²⁴² *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 33 (statement of Constantino Urcuyo-Fournier).

²⁴³ "UN Comtrade," UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

Nicaraguan imports of all three had plummeted.²⁴⁴ Midway through 2014, Russia stopped donating wheat to Nicaragua in favor of selling it instead.²⁴⁵ These data support Ellis's contention that ongoing low oil prices since summer 2014, as well as economic sanctions against Russia from the United States and Europe since 2014, are likely to limit the resources that Russia has available to finance projects in Latin America.²⁴⁶

Figure 1. Nicaraguan Imports from Russia



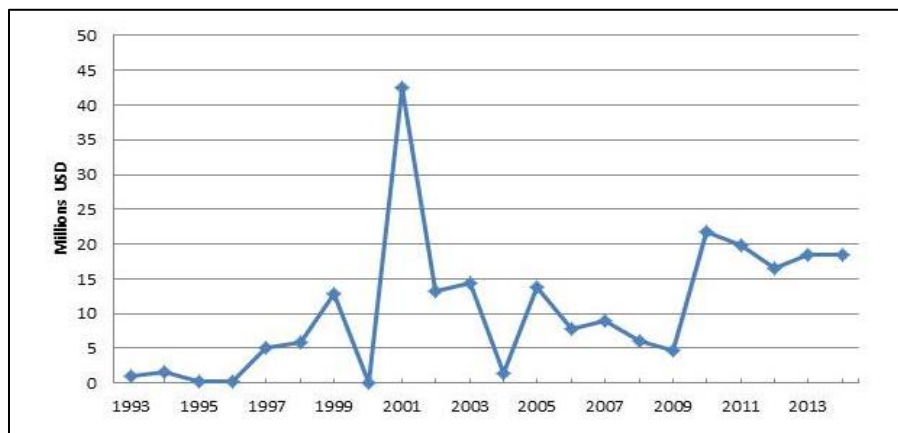
Source: "UN Comtrade," UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

²⁴⁴ "Trade Map," International Trade Centre, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral.aspx>.

²⁴⁵ "Nicaragua firma con empresas acuerdo para comprar trigo procedente de Rusia" [Nicaragua signs with companies agreement to buy wheat from Russia], *La Prensa*, August 6, 2014, <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2014/08/06/economia/206488-nicaragua-firma-con-empresas-acuerdo-para-comprar-trigo-procedente-de-rusia>.

²⁴⁶ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 76–77.

Figure 2. Nicaraguan Exports to Russia



Source: “UN Comtrade,” UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

After Putin’s July 2014 visit, Russia approached Nicaragua to secure more imports of Nicaraguan fruits, vegetables, coffee, and beef since Russia banned the import of those commodities from Europe.²⁴⁷ Groundnuts, beef, and coffee were indeed Nicaragua’s top exports to Russia that year; yet, those products were also the top exports the year before, and total exports stayed roughly the same between the two years. When 2015 trade data become available, it will be interesting to see whether they indicate a significant increase in food exports to Russia. As a side note, the spike in Nicaraguan exports to Russia in 2001 consisted almost entirely of sugar.²⁴⁸

c. *Comparatively Insignificant Economic Ties*

Altogether, commercial activities between Russia and Nicaragua have been relatively miniscule. Whereas Nicaragua exported a paltry \$19.9 million of goods to Russia and imported a mere \$33.4 million of Russian goods in 2014, Nicaragua exported \$2.8 billion of goods to the United States and imported \$1.1 billion of U.S. goods that

²⁴⁷ Diana Villiers Negroponte, “What’s Putin’s Game in the Western Hemisphere?,” *Americas Quarterly: The Decline of U.S. Power?*, Winter 2015, <http://americasquarterly.org/content/whats-putins-game-western-hemisphere>; *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 40 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

²⁴⁸ “UN Comtrade.”

year. Since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008–2009, the United States has persevered as Nicaragua’s top trading partner—though neck and neck with Venezuela until 2014. In 2014, Mexico was Nicaragua’s second largest trading partner, while Nicaraguan imports of Chinese goods in 2014 were in third place for a total of \$625 million.²⁴⁹ Due to the privileged access to the U.S. export market that the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) provides, “Nicaragua has become the second fastest growing exporter of apparel to the United States.”²⁵⁰ Russia’s insignificant trade with Nicaragua mirrors its insignificant trade with Latin America writ large. Russian trade with Latin America reportedly increased from \$3 billion in 2000 to \$24 billion in 2013; in stark contrast, Chinese trade with the region was about \$260 billion in 2013.²⁵¹

Moreover, as mentioned, Russia’s ability to finance projects—including its possible future participation in the Nicaraguan canal project—is limited due to ongoing low oil prices and economic sanctions from the West.²⁵² Low oil prices have mostly impacted the revenues of the central government and thus its ability to subsidize its recession-riddled economy. The sanctions have most significantly limited Russian oil and gas companies’ ability to finance investments in foreign markets.²⁵³ Negroponte adds that the sanctions will limit Latin American financial institutions’ willingness to “enter joint ventures with Russian banks for fear of becoming tainted and thus subject to U.S. Treasury penalties. We might expect continued declarations of prospective deals, but should remain skeptical about the capacity to implement those agreements.”²⁵⁴ Even before the problems of 2014, Russian financing in Nicaragua was apparently limited.

²⁴⁹ International Monetary Fund, “Merchandise Trade by Country,” IMF eLibrary Data, updated February 24, 2016, <http://data.imf.org/?sk=253a4049-e94d-4228-b99d-561553731322&ss=1390030323199>.

²⁵⁰ Francisco E. González, “Latin America in the Economic Equation—Winners and Losers: What Can Losers Do?,” in *China’s Expansion into the Western Hemisphere*, ed. Riordan Roett and Guadalupe Paz (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 159, <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780815775546>.

²⁵¹ Negroponte, “What’s Putin’s Game in the Western Hemisphere?”

²⁵² Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 78.

²⁵³ Edward C. Chow, “Efficacy of Sanctions against Energy-Producing Countries,” in *Global Forecast 2016*, ed. Craig Cohen and Melissa G. Dalton (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2015), 114, http://csis.org/files/publication/151116_Cohen_GlobalForecast2016_Web.pdf.

²⁵⁴ Negroponte, “What’s Putin’s Game in the Western Hemisphere?”

Reported foreign direct investment (FDI) flows from Russia to Nicaragua this millennium—at least through 2012—have been nonexistent.²⁵⁵

In contrast, some of the other BRICS countries have made some less tenuous investments in Nicaragua in recent years. For instance, Brazilian companies are financing the construction of a hydroelectric power plant at Tumarín.²⁵⁶ Meanwhile, in addition to the Nicaraguan canal project, a separate Chinese company, China Great Wall Industries Corporation—with Chinese banks’ financing—is reportedly building Nicaragua’s first- and second-ever communications satellites. The first is to be in orbit by 2017.²⁵⁷

C. CONCLUSION

Contrasts are apparent between Soviet ties with the FSLN regime during the 1980s and Russian ties with Nicaragua in the contemporary era. In the 1980s, the Soviet Union did develop political, military, and economic ties with the nascent FSLN regime, but the Soviet Union refrained from committing itself fully to it and tried to mostly keep its involvement discreet. The Soviets provided the new regime most of the military and economic support it needed to counter U.S. efforts to undermine it, while not creating another dependency like Cuba or allowing the Cubans or the FSLN to drag the Soviet Union into a conflict with the United States. While Russia has provided Nicaragua some material security-related and economic support in the contemporary era and its assistance is less discreet now, its support is much less substantial than the support the Soviets had provided. Moreover, the United States and other countries are much more important to Nicaragua economically and have also provided it some security-related assistance. Overall, one cannot say that the Soviet “bear”—defined by vital military and economic assistance to the regime—has returned to Nicaragua.

²⁵⁵ UN Conference on Trade and Development, *Bilateral FDI Statistics 2014* (Geneva: UN, 2014), <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/FDI%20Statistics/FDI-Statistics-Bilateral.aspx>.

²⁵⁶ Ricardo Guerrero, “BCIE dispone US\$280 millones para Tumarín” [BCIE has US\$280 million for Tumarín], *El Nuevo Diario*, July 11, 2014, <http://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/economia/324542-bcie-dispone-us-280-millones-tumarin/>.

²⁵⁷ “Nicaragua Plans to Have 2 Satellites in Orbit by 2017,” *EFE*, November 18, 2015, <http://www.efe.com/efe/english/technology/nicaragua-plans-to-have-2-satellites-in-orbit-by-2017/50000267-2767737>.

The closeness of Nicaraguan-Russian ties is a reflection more of their mutual political support and certain aspects of their security ties. While ideology is not important for them today, the two provide each other an important ally in countering U.S./Western influence. Meanwhile, Managua has enabled Moscow to use Nicaragua to show Russian strategic presence in the U.S. periphery—most poignantly by allowing its strategic, nuclear-capable bombers to land in Nicaragua. That military presence is purposely much less discreet than Soviet military presence in Nicaragua was supposed to be; Nicaragua is enabling Russia to use “power projection in an attempt to erode U.S. leadership and challenge U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere.”²⁵⁸ Meanwhile, although Russian deployments and basing talks may seem fleeting, the two countries’ counter-narcotics cooperation in the past few years illustrates that they may maintain enduring ties in such limited areas. Yet, their counter-narcotics cooperation seemingly does not undermine U.S. efforts in the region and involves a limited presence of Russian personnel in the country, like the limited Soviet personnel presence there during the 1980s—only without the large presence of Cuban advisors now. Nonetheless, such aspects of Nicaraguan-Russian ties today as their counter-narcotics cooperation and Russian bombers landing in Nicaragua may show that Russia’s ties with Nicaragua today are closer than its ties with Cuba. Farah says that the FSLN regime is “arguably Russia’s closest ally in Latin America.”²⁵⁹ All of these facets of the bilateral relationship today portend implications for U.S. policy, which this thesis will discuss in Chapter IV.

²⁵⁸ *U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command*, 8 (statement of General John F. Kelly).

²⁵⁹ Ellis, “Russian Influence in Latin America.”

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III. CUBAN-RUSSIAN TIES

Next, this thesis examines the closeness of ties between Russia and Cuba today. Russian-Cuban ties today pale in comparison, in particular, with the magnitude of Soviet-Cuban ties during their relatively halcyon years of the 1970s and most of the 1980s. This chapter first examines Soviet-Cuban ties throughout the Cold War and then delves into Russian-Cuban ties in the post-Cold War era; for each period, the thesis assesses the closeness of bilateral political, security, and economic ties.

A. SOVIET-CUBAN TIES IN THE COLD WAR

Cuba had a pre-revolutionary past similar to Nicaragua's. The United States administered Cuba from 1898 to 1902 after winning the Spanish-American War. In 1902, the United States granted Cuba its independence but reserved the authority to intervene militarily to maintain order in Cuba with the Platt Amendment, as codified in the 1901 Cuban Constitution. Indeed, by 1921 the United States did intervene in Cuba on three occasions.²⁶⁰ Moreover, the United States established a lasting presence on the island with the Guantanamo Bay naval facility built in Cuba in 1903 based on a deal with Havana.²⁶¹ In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt declared a "Good Neighbor Policy," by which the United States would no longer intervene militarily in Latin America. Relations became markedly neighborly between the United States and Latin America through the end of World War II, after which anti-imperialist—mostly anti-U.S.—sentiment emerged in Latin America, including among Cuban nationalists.²⁶² Having been influenced by anti-imperialist sentiments since his law school days in the late 1940s, Fidel Castro had become a fervent nationalist and came to see Cuban President Fulgencio Batista—"because of his U.S. backing and his staunch support of U.S. anticommunism in the

²⁶⁰ Mark P. Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress* (CRS Report No. R43024) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 29, 2014), 4.

²⁶¹ Sánchez, "Geosecurity 101," 2.

²⁶² John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006): 238-40, 266.

OAS—as an agent of imperialism.”²⁶³ Fidel and his brother Raúl launched a failed attack against Batista’s army in 1953 after Batista had seized power through a coup in 1952. Batista exiled the Castros to Mexico, where they met Ernesto “Ché” Guevara, an internationalist revolutionary from Argentina. Together, the three of them and a small assault force returned to Cuba in 1956 and fought guerrilla warfare for the next two years to overthrow Batista’s regime.²⁶⁴

Fidel Castro’s resistance movement was not aligned with the Soviets before the revolution.²⁶⁵ In 1902, the Russian Empire had instituted diplomatic relations with Cuba.²⁶⁶ The Soviet Union continued diplomatic relations with the island. Yet, the Soviet Union had seen the Caribbean as an area in which U.S. influence precluded communist advancement.²⁶⁷ As such, the local Soviet-affiliated communists in Cuba followed Soviet guidance to compromise with their country’s respective leader.²⁶⁸ Under Batista’s administration as elected president during the early 1940s, the communist *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP) had held a ministerial post and administered the official Confederation of Cuban Workers.²⁶⁹ Subsequently, the Soviets ended diplomatic relations with Cuba after Batista took over as dictator through the aforementioned coup in 1952. Yet, Soviet leadership was disinterested in Fidel Castro’s nascent rebellion against the Batista regime, even after Castro’s group attacked the Moncada Barracks in 1953 and later sparked a guerrilla war.²⁷⁰ The Soviet-aligned PSP did not join Castro’s July 26th Movement until the last minute—in 1958—with insignificant support in helping to defeat Batista’s regime.²⁷¹ Batista fled Cuba on January 1, 1959.²⁷² Even after Castro’s victory,

²⁶³ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 266.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 266–67.

²⁶⁵ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 21.

²⁶⁶ Katarzyna Krzywicka, “The Russian Federation’s Policy toward Latin American States,” *Latitud Sur* 4, no. 4 (2009): 33, <http://ojs.econ.uba.ar/ojs/index.php/LATSUR/article/view/601/1115>.

²⁶⁷ Herbert S. Dinerstein, *Soviet Policy in Latin America* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1966): 1, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4967.html.

²⁶⁸ Booth, Wade, and Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 287.

²⁶⁹ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 17.

²⁷⁰ Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2005): 181.

²⁷¹ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 21.

the Soviets and the PSP were cautious in embracing him; they “regarded him as another *petit-bourgeois* leader, more promising than most, but still a man who might make his peace with the United States and continue the social structure essentially unchanged.”²⁷³

1. Cuba and the Superpowers after the Revolution

Only upon the decline of U.S. relations with the nascent Castro regime starting in 1959 did the Soviets see Castro’s revolution as “a genuine social revolution in Latin America, seemingly tolerated by the United States.”²⁷⁴ Despite early disagreement within the U.S. State Department about whether the United States could cope with Castro being in power, “by 1959, State Department officials concluded that Castro would have to go and reviewed policy options in mid-1960.”²⁷⁵ In 1959, the Soviets had begun selling arms to Cuba.²⁷⁶ The following February, the two countries established a trade agreement of sugar for equipment, even before the United States broke relations with Cuba.²⁷⁷ Then, in June 1960, Cuba began buying Russian crude oil, which the U.S.-owned refineries on Cuba would not refine. In turn, Castro nationalized the refineries. The United States promptly stopped buying Cuban sugar.²⁷⁸ The Soviets undergirded Cuba by promising to buy all the sugar that was meant for the United States. The Castro regime continued expropriating U.S. properties.²⁷⁹ In September 1960, the Soviets began exporting tanks to Cuba, followed by artillery and other military hardware; in addition, Soviet military advisors began going to Cuba.²⁸⁰ By late 1960, the Soviets had additionally begun sending MiG-15 fighter training aircraft to Cuba.²⁸¹ That December, the U.S.

²⁷² Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 4.

²⁷³ Dinerstein, *Soviet Policy in Latin America*, 19.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Cottam, *Images and Intervention*, 49.

²⁷⁶ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999): 83.

²⁷⁷ Skidmore, Smith, and Green, *Modern Latin America*, 134.

²⁷⁸ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 268.

²⁷⁹ H. Michael Erisman, *Cuba’s Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 59.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 60.

²⁸¹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

administration ceased nearly all exports to Cuba and decided to import no Cuban sugar at all in 1961. Formal diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba dissolved in January 1961.²⁸² All the while, Castro had still not declared himself or the revolution to be socialist or Marxist. John C. Chasteen states, “Never—not as a student radical in the 1940s, nor as a guerrilla leader in the 1950s—was Castro close to the Moscow-line Cuban Communist Party.”²⁸³

Nonetheless, Castro changed his stated political leanings in 1961—ultimately securing deeper Soviet support. In April 1961, a day after U.S. airstrikes on Cuba and the day before the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Castro declared the revolution to be socialist.²⁸⁴ Then, in December 1961, he announced that “he was a devout Marxist-Leninist and would remain so until the day he died.”²⁸⁵ Jacque Lévesque notes that all experts on Cuba hold that Castro made both of those declarations to secure military protection from the Soviet Union as a member of the socialist camp.²⁸⁶ In February 1962, the Soviets learned that President Kennedy had ordered that a contingency plan be written to plan for the event of another invasion of Cuba. In response, a *Pravda* editorial relayed an implicit threat of retaliation to countries that hosted U.S. military bases, in the event that the United States were to threaten Cuba.²⁸⁷ According to Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, relations between Havana and Moscow did hit a few obstacles in March 1962, when Castro attacked the Moscow-aligned leader of the PSP, Anibal Escalante, and attempted to gain economic aid from China. Nonetheless, the Soviets decided to increase their commitment to the Castro regime. In April that year, they delivered SA-2 surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, coastal defense cruise missiles (CDCMs), military trainers,

²⁸² Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations*, 60.

²⁸³ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 268.

²⁸⁴ Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations*, 60–62.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁸⁶ Jacque Lévesque, *The USSR and the Cuban Revolution: Soviet Ideological and Strategical Perspectives, 1959-77*, trans. Deanna Drendel Leboeuf (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978), 32.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

and a regiment of troops to Cuba.²⁸⁸ Moreover, the Soviets were shipping the Cubans a number of MiG-17 and MiG-19 fighters.²⁸⁹

In May 1962, Khrushchev decided to send a larger military group with nuclear-capable ballistic missiles to Cuba—but not at Castro’s request. Castro had expressed that he did not want to allow any country to set up a military base on Cuba, so as to not provoke a U.S. attack.²⁹⁰ Nonetheless, “in the end, Castro did accept the missiles. But he and his colleagues always said that they did this only because they felt obliged to help the Soviet Union in its desire to change the global balance of power.”²⁹¹ For Khrushchev’s part, according to his 1970 memoirs, keeping the United States from undertaking “precipitous military action against Castro’s government” was the principal reason for his decision to send the missiles but that the missiles would also have leveled the playing field with the United States.²⁹² According to James Blight and Philip Brenner, “More recent testimony from former Soviet officials confirms the finding that at least one major Soviet objective in placing missiles in Cuba was to secure it against a possible U.S. invasion.”²⁹³ In September 1962, the Soviets began shipping to Cuba medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs), IL-28 medium bombers, and top-of-the-line MiG-21 fighters with air-to-air missiles.²⁹⁴ Unconfirmed to the United States at the time of the crisis, in October, nuclear warheads and bombs had arrived for the MRBMs, IL-28s, CDCMs, and short-range rockets, as well as for the awaited intermediate-range ballistic missiles that were on their way to Cuba too late to skirt the U.S. blockade emplaced on October 24.²⁹⁵ Moreover, over 40,000 Soviet ground troops and technicians were in Cuba by that

²⁸⁸ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 86.

²⁸⁹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

²⁹⁰ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 87–88.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 88; see also: John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1998), 265.

²⁹² Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, ed. and trans. Strobe Talbott, with an introduction, commentary, and notes by Edward Crankshaw. (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1970), 494.

²⁹³ James G. Blight and Philip Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba’s Struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 9.

²⁹⁴ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 203.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.; Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 274–75.

time.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, Khrushchev reportedly told Guevara that he had authorized the deployment of the Soviets' Baltic Fleet—11 submarines and more than 22 surface vessels—if need be.²⁹⁷

Nonetheless, the tense standoff of the Cuban Missile Crisis ended in negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The latter conceded to withdrawing its nuclear-capable missiles. The United States pledged to refrain from invading Cuba.²⁹⁸ Moreover, it secretly agreed to withdraw a unit of antiquated MRBMs from Turkey.²⁹⁹ Having been left out of the negotiations, Castro was outraged to have learned of Khrushchev and Kennedy's October 27 decision over the radio on October 28, alongside the rest of the Cuban population. The Soviets told Castro that there was no time to consult him. Castro and the Cubans felt betrayed.³⁰⁰ Blight and Brenner say, "Literally overnight, the Cuban perception of the Soviets shifted from that of savior to traitor. Just as Judas had betrayed Jesus ironically with a kiss, the Soviets had betrayed Cuba, with equal irony, with their bogus offer of a boundless fraternal commitment to Cuba's security."³⁰¹

2. Ties from the Missile Crisis until Gorbachev

For most of the decade after the Missile Crisis, Cuban-Soviet ties would remain turbulent. Nevertheless, after the two sides reconciled before the turn of the decade, their ties grew to be quite close until nearly the end of the Cold War, as the Soviets pervaded Cuba's state and economy. The following subsections detail those early stormy relations and subsequent tightly knit ties thematically by political, security, and economic ties.

²⁹⁶ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 206.

²⁹⁷ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 275.

²⁹⁸ Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire*, 269.

²⁹⁹ Bruce W. MacDonald, "Looking Back on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 50 Years Later," United States Institute of Peace, October 19, 2012, <http://www.usip.org/publications/looking-back-the-cuban-missile-crisis-50-years-later>.

³⁰⁰ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, 25.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

a. Turbulent, Then Reconciled Political Ties

After its perceived betrayal at the hands of the Soviets, the Castro regime publicly criticized the Soviets. The regime criticized the Soviets as being too submissive to the United States in light of the latter's involvement in areas such as Vietnam and only concerned with the national security of the Soviet Union itself and directing other countries' communist parties. Criticism increased after Leonid Brezhnev and Aleksei Kosygin replaced the deposed Khrushchev in his first secretary and premier positions, respectively, in 1964.³⁰² Continued U.S. covert action against the Castro regime from 1963 to 1965 "reinforced the Cubans' conviction that the United States was a mortal enemy and that Moscow's efforts to placate Washington were antithetical to Cuban interests."³⁰³ In January 1966, Havana hosted a Tricontinental Conference of over 500 delegates from Latin America, Africa, and Asia—in an attempt to establish a Cuba-led alternative to the Soviets' network of communist parties that would be dedicated to armed revolt anywhere possible. At the conference, Castro criticized the Soviet Union's ostensibly meager support to North Vietnam, as well as Latin American communist parties for their inactivity in advancing socialist liberation.³⁰⁴ Besides criticizing other local communist parties, Castro "had begun purging pro-Moscow elements from the Communist Party of Cuba [PCC]...By thus radicalising Latin American communism and committing it to revolution, Castro succeeded mainly in alarming noncommunist political forces and undermining Soviet diplomatic efforts throughout the region."³⁰⁵ Castro had merged the PSP with his 26th of July Movement in 1965 to form the PCC, but "*Fidelistas*," rather than former PSP members, dominated the party.³⁰⁶

Ties took a marked downturn in 1967, as the Soviets responded. By early that year, Brezhnev pushed for "bringing the Cubans into line....In a message sent by the Soviet leadership...the Cubans were told that they had provoked the United States

³⁰² Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, 98–99.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 100–101.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁰⁵ Miller, *Soviet Foreign Policy Today*, 150.

³⁰⁶ Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations*, 74.

repeatedly and that, should the United States decide to move militarily against Cuba (as well they might), the Cubans should not expect the Russians to lift a finger on their behalf.”³⁰⁷ The Brezhnev administration cited particular displeasure from Guevara’s attempt to incite armed revolt in Bolivia.³⁰⁸ In June 1967, the Castro regime refused to follow the Soviet bloc in breaking diplomatic ties with Israel in light of the Six-Day War; Castro identified with Israel’s struggle. Moreover, Castro criticized the Soviets’ abandonment of the Arabs—a reminder of the Soviets’ betrayal of Cuba in 1962.³⁰⁹ Then, at an August 1967 Havana-hosted conference of the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS)—a group of revolutionary movements—Cuba made clear to the Soviets that it had its own foreign policy of continuing to engage in revolution, even when it would have to do so against Soviet-backed elements.³¹⁰ Due to Castro’s intransigence, the Soviets began curbing oil deliveries to the island, especially in late 1967. Until then, the Soviet Union had been fulfilling 99.3 percent of Cuba’s oil import needs, but that year, Soviet deliveries began falling short of Cuban oil demand.³¹¹ As a result, by early January 1968, Cuba had to embrace widespread oil rationing.³¹² Later that month, Raúl Castro accused a “microfaction” in the PCC of conspiring with the Soviets to remove the Castro regime.³¹³ Raúl had the leader of the ring, Moscow-aligned Aníbal Escalante and 34 others imprisoned, seemingly to show Russia that the Castro regime would not allow it to determine Cuba’s domestic and foreign policies.³¹⁴

Still, a series of setbacks led the Castro regime to reconcile with the Soviets in mid-1968. Failing to incite a revolution in Bolivia, Ché Guevara met his demise there in

³⁰⁷ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, 122.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 123.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 129–31.

³¹¹ Ibid., xxii–xxiii.

³¹² Erisman, *Cuba’s Foreign Relations*, 75.

³¹³ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, 134–35.

³¹⁴ Erisman, *Cuba’s Foreign Relations*, 74–75.

October 1967 at the hands of the Bolivian military.³¹⁵ Kevin Ginter says, “His death symbolized the failure of Cuba’s strategy in Latin America and would lead to a major turning-point for Cuban-Soviet relations and Cuba’s Latin America policy.”³¹⁶ Meanwhile, economic woes afflicted Cuba’s resolve. In January 1968, Castro had to implement oil rationing in light of the aforementioned shortage of Soviet deliveries. Moreover, in March 1968, Moscow only partially fulfilled a deal with Havana to increase bilateral trade.³¹⁷ Cuba felt “a sense of growing political isolation and economic vulnerability, which in turn translated into intensified security concerns....Cuba’s pragmatism led it to reconfigure its international priorities.”³¹⁸ It became willing to cooperate with governments pursuing liberal reforms, not just radical regimes.³¹⁹ In July 1968, Castro delivered a speech indicating that “Cuba was ready to live and let live with the Soviets.”³²⁰

Cuban-Soviet political rapprochement proceeded thereafter. Castro decided to publicly support the Soviet Union’s August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, as well as the Brezhnev Doctrine released the following month.³²¹ Cuba ceased challenging the Soviets on international political matters. The Cubans supported the Soviets’ policy not only in Czechoslovakia but also in Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, and Poland in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Moreover, they supported the Soviet Union in its antagonism with the People’s Republic of China. Cuba became as loyal to the Soviet Union as the Eastern European Soviet bloc countries.³²² Cuban foreign policy interests converged with those of the Soviet Union “and culminated in their joint intervention in Angola and Ethiopia in

³¹⁵ Kevin Ginter, “Truth and Mirage: The Cuba-Venezuela Security and Intelligence Alliance,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 26, no. 2 (2013): 222, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2013.758003>.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Erisman, *Cuba’s Foreign Relations*, 75.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 75–76.

³²⁰ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, 139.

³²¹ Erisman, *Cuba’s Foreign Relations*, 75–76.

³²² Robert A. Packenham, “Capitalist Dependency and Socialist Dependency: The Case of Cuba,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/165736>.

the mid-1970s.”³²³ The next section addresses the topic of Cuban troop deployments in more detail. Meanwhile, “the Soviets...took advantage of Castro’s weakened position to insist on greater policy harmony and less Cuban ‘adventurism’ in the Western Hemisphere.”³²⁴ Thus, in the 1970s, Cuba decreased its support to revolutionary groups elsewhere.³²⁵ Nonetheless, Cuba did support revolutionary movements in Central America and in Grenada. As touched on in the previous chapter, “with regard to Central America and the Caribbean, it is clear that Cuba had acted independently and as a kind of revolutionary tour guide and mentor for the USSR.”³²⁶ Domestically, the Soviet Union reorganized Cuba’s government after it had to bail out the latter economically in 1970. The Soviets then reorganized the PCC and the entire bureaucracy.³²⁷ To sum it up, as Robert Packenham wrote in 1986, “Domestically, since 1970 the Cuban polity, economy, and society have increasingly been reorganized along Soviet lines. In the international sphere, particularly since 1968, the Cuban government has accepted the Soviet government as its ‘senior partner’ in foreign policy.”³²⁸ The following two sub-sections highlight Soviet pervasiveness in Cuban activities.

b. Security Ties

After the Missile Crisis, Cubans had doubted Soviet commitment to their protection. Blight and Brenner say, “The Cubans would never fully trust the Soviets again for the security of their island.”³²⁹ For what it is worth, though, First Deputy Chairman Anastas Mikoyan conveyed to Castro in November 1962 that the Soviet Union would provide the Cubans the weapons it needed for its defense but that it was not willing to fight the United States in a nuclear war on Cuba’s behalf or over any other

³²³ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 8.

³²⁴ Ginter, “Truth and Mirage,” 222.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 223, 226.

³²⁶ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 119.

³²⁷ Packenham, “Capitalist Dependency and Socialist Dependency,” 71.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

³²⁹ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, 74.

matter.³³⁰ During the early to mid-1960s, the Soviets did provide the Cubans some more tanks, anti-aircraft guns, and patrol vessels. Even during the most politically tumultuous years of 1966 to 1968, the Soviets provided the Cubans some equipment for their own defense such as a handful of transport aircraft and some MRLs and amphibious vehicles. Yet, it did not provide any new advanced systems.³³¹ Meanwhile, the Soviets continued to use Cuba for their own defense purposes during the 1960s; namely, in 1964, the Soviets broke ground on the Lourdes SIGINT facility, with which they could reportedly collect on U.S. communications and military activities including naval deployments and rocket launches.³³² In addition to the military personnel working at the facility, the Soviets maintained a brigade including motorized rifle battalions and a tank battalion—roughly 2,600 troops—near Havana³³³; the brigade was responsible for protecting the facility.³³⁴

By the early 1970s after the reconciliation, Cuba ostensibly began to trust the Soviet Union again for its defense. In particular, after Castro's visit to Moscow in 1972, he reportedly felt confident that the Soviet Union would protect Cuba against the United States, if necessary.³³⁵ From 1972 to 1974, the Soviets provided the Cubans several MiG-21 fighters with air-to-air missiles and fast-attack boats with anti-ship missiles.³³⁶ By 1975, the Soviets had a contingent of about 2,000 additional military personnel on Cuba; most were likely responsible for advising the Cubans on Soviet military equipment,

³³⁰ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, 80–81.

³³¹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

³³² Juan O. Tamayo, "Report: Russia Will Reopen Spy Base in Cuba," *Miami Herald*, July 16, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/article1975822.html>.

³³³ Norman Howard and Colleen Sussman, eds., "Cuban Armed Forces and the Soviet Military Presence," *The DISAM Journal* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1982-83): 81, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a497385.pdf>.

³³⁴ Director of Central Intelligence, *Prospects for Soviet Military Assistance to Cuba*, National Intelligence Council Executive Brief 01140/90, CIA Historical Review Program (Washington, DC: CIA, November 7, 1990), 3–4, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0001325081.pdf.

³³⁵ Erisman, *Cuba's Foreign Relations*, 77.

³³⁶ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

conducting other training, and collaborating with Cuban intelligence.³³⁷ Meanwhile, by 1975, the Soviet navy had been deploying reconnaissance-variant Tu-95 aircraft to Havana on three to four iterations per year to collect on U.S. exercises and other military activities during tense political times, and Soviet navy combat vessels would conduct periodic visits to Cuba while deployed to the Caribbean.³³⁸ Moreover, Soviet intelligence ships would routinely stop in at Cuba while deployed to collect along the U.S. East Coast, and the Soviets kept a salvage and rescue vessel stationed in Cuba as well.³³⁹

Starting in 1975, the Soviets revitalized the Cuban military, converting it from a self-defense force into the most heavily armed offensive force in Latin America that could “project power well beyond Cuba’s shores.”³⁴⁰ Over the next decade and a half, the Soviets delivered tremendous amounts of military hardware to Cuba including more advanced systems than those the Cubans previously had. In addition to receiving further MiG-21s, SA-2 missiles, artillery pieces, tanks, and boats, the Cubans received advanced MiG-23 fighter/ground-attack aircraft and MiG-29 fighters with beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles; SA-3, SA-6, and SA-13 SAM systems; SA-7 MANPADS and then the more advanced SA-14 and SA-16 MANPADS; Mi-24 attack helicopters; and transport aircraft.³⁴¹ As of 1981, the number of Soviet military personnel in the contingent of advisers was up to about 2,400 to train the Cubans on their new equipment and to maintain it.³⁴² Mervyn Bain offers that the advanced Soviet hardware that the Cubans received, as well as a 1984 agreement for 25 years of cooperation, was compensation for the Cubans’ joint operations with the Soviet military in Africa.³⁴³

³³⁷ Director of Central Intelligence, *Cuba’s Changing International Role*, National Intelligence Estimate 85-1-75, CIA Historical Review Program (Washington, DC: CIA, October 16, 1975), 10, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000828150.pdf.

³³⁸ Ibid.; Howard and Sussman, “Cuban Armed Forces and the Soviet Military Presence,” 82.

³³⁹ Howard and Sussman, “Cuban Armed Forces and the Soviet Military Presence,” 81.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 74.

³⁴¹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

³⁴² Packenham, “Capitalist Dependency and Socialist Dependency,” 87.

³⁴³ Mervyn J. Bain, “Havana and Moscow: The Washington Factor,” in *Fifty Years of Revolution*, ed. Soraya M. Castro Mariño and Ronald W. Pruessen (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012), 76, <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780813043616>.

As noted, starting in the mid-1970s, the Cubans joined the Soviets in operations in Africa, notably in Angola and Ethiopia.³⁴⁴ Cole Blasier says, regarding Cuba and the Soviet Union, “Never before had the two countries engaged in combined military operations. The Cubans supplied most of the troops and the USSR the field commanders, combat advisers, weapons, and financial support.”³⁴⁵ By 1979, Cuba had an estimated 34,000 military technicians deployed to less-developed countries (LDCs)—33,000 in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, the Soviet bloc had only about 16,000 deployed to LDCs, with only about 4,000 of them deployed to Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁴⁶ By 1982, the number of Cuban troops and advisers deployed had skyrocketed to an estimated 70,000 in 23 countries.³⁴⁷ Regarding whether the Cuban troops were merely Soviet proxies, Packenham offers, “Many commentators maintain that Cuba's foreign policy reflects Cuba's own interests. However, it is not plausible that a country of Cuba's size, location and precarious economy would, in its own interests, have 70,000 troops and military advisers in 23 countries around the world, mostly in Africa and the Middle East, where the troops are Cuban but the officers” Soviet.³⁴⁸ Yet, the Cubans were not entirely puppets of the Soviets. As noted, the Cubans seemingly guided the Soviets in their joint involvement in Central America and the Caribbean.³⁴⁹ Moreover, the Cubans spearheaded the efforts in support of the Popular Movement for the National Liberation of Angola in 1975—with which Ché Guevara had developed ties in 1965—whereas the Soviets were hesitant to support it.³⁵⁰ In contrast, in Ethiopia in 1978, “the USSR took command, in a manner of speaking, of the defense of the Ethiopian government and

³⁴⁴ Director of Central Intelligence, *Soviet Policies and Activities*, 8.

³⁴⁵ Cole Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America, Revised Edition* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 114.

³⁴⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency National Foreign Assessment Center, *Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries, 1979 and 1954-79*, Research Paper ER 80-10318U, CIA Historical Review Program (Washington, DC: CIA, October 1980), 6, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000499891.pdf.

³⁴⁷ Hugh Thomas, Georges A. Fauriol, and Juan Carlos Weiss, *The Cuban Revolution: 25 Years Later* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 12.

³⁴⁸ Packenham, “Capitalist Dependency and Socialist Dependency,” 88.

³⁴⁹ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 119.

³⁵⁰ Blasier, *Giant's Rival*, 114-15.

persuaded the Cubans to bring in seventeen thousand troops, many from Angola.”³⁵¹ Yet, the Soviet military contingent in Ethiopia was comprised of a mere one thousand advisers.³⁵² Blasier notes that one may argue that the Cubans were proxies of the Soviets in Ethiopia; nevertheless, he says, “But even there, the Cubans could not have been forced to fight against their will.”³⁵³

c. Economic Ties

After 1970, Soviet influence pervaded the Cuban economy as well. That year, Cuba’s economy suffered “severe developmental dislocations as a result of its unsuccessful (and, said many observers, foolish) attempt to bring in an unprecedented 10 million ton sugar harvest in 1970.”³⁵⁴ As a result, Cuba truly came to depend on the Soviets more than ever for aid.³⁵⁵ As Packenham notes, that same year, the Soviets conducted the aforementioned reorganization of Cuba’s bureaucracy and established the Cuban-Soviet Commission for Economic, Scientific, and Technical Collaboration. The Commission orchestrated the activities of Cuba’s trade, industries, mining, and agricultural ministries and agencies. Soviet technicians flooded into Cuba in the early 1970s to guide the provision of Soviet assistance. By 1972, Cuba had joined the Soviet bloc’s COMECON group and subsequently aligned its own five-year economic plans with those of the Soviet Union.³⁵⁶

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union subsidized its trade with Cuba to undergird the latter’s economy. It “provided weapon systems, oil, and finished goods in exchange for sugar at artificially high prices....thus demonstrating its political and military support for a nation under U.S. economic sanctions. The trade for sugar provided a veil of legitimacy

³⁵¹ Blasier, *Giant’s Rival*, 115.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁵⁴ Erisman, *Cuba’s Foreign Relations*, 76–77.

³⁵⁵ Miller, *Soviet Foreign Policy Today*, 150.

³⁵⁶ Packenham, “Capitalist Dependency and Socialist Dependency,” 71–72.

for this exchange.”³⁵⁷ Overall bilateral trade increased from 961 million Cuban pesos in 1968 to 1.2 billion pesos in 1970, to 4.8 billion in 1978, and then up to 9.9 billion in 1985.³⁵⁸ From then until the end of the decade, Cuba’s trade with the Soviet Union reportedly accounted for about 70 percent of Cuba’s overall trade³⁵⁹; trade with the other COMECON countries accounted for about another 15 percent.³⁶⁰ Moreover, the Cubans supposedly accumulated a debt of about \$32 billion to the Soviet Union.³⁶¹ Thus, Cuba’s economy was deeply entrenched with and dependent on that of the Soviet Union. Yuri Pavlov says, “The relationship with Cuba was the biggest single expenditure of the USSR on a friendly political regime, amounting to hundreds of millions of tons of oil and other raw materials, machinery, equipment, and foodstuff.”³⁶²

3. Ties under Gorbachev and the End of Soviet Support

In the final years of the Cold War, however, Cuban-Soviet ties deteriorated. After Gorbachev’s initiation of “new thinking,” *glasnost*, and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, he faced difficulties justifying the Soviet Union’s close relationship with a Cuba that refused to reform. Indeed, in a speech to the Congress of People’s Deputies of the Soviet Union on April 5, 1989, Castro described why Cuba did not need Gorbachev’s reforms.³⁶³ He clung doggedly to Marxism-Leninism, emphasizing “the need to fight for socialism ‘to the last drop of blood’ and argued against multiparty systems and the market economy.”³⁶⁴ Moreover, as in the aftermath of the Missile Crisis, Moscow was embracing a conciliatory approach toward Washington, thus diminishing

³⁵⁷ Clayton K.S. Chun, *Do Oil Exports Fuel Defense Spending?*, Strategic Studies Institute (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College Press, February 17, 2010), 20, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=967>.

³⁵⁸ Erisman, *Cuba’s Foreign Relations*, 69, 77, 109.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁶⁰ Mao Xianglin and Mariana Ortega Breña, “Cuban Reform and Economic Opening: Retrospective and Assessment,” *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 6 (November 2007): 94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27648061>.

³⁶¹ Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 18.

³⁶² Yuri I. Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance: 1959-1991* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 261.

³⁶³ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 77.

³⁶⁴ Xianglin and Ortega Breña, “Cuban Reform and Economic Opening,” 95.

“the geostrategic importance of Cuba for Moscow.”³⁶⁵ As noted in the previous chapter, by 1989, Gorbachev began cooperating with Bush to resolve the Central American conflicts and stopped consulting Castro on such matters.³⁶⁶ Further, the Soviets insisted that the Cubans, as well as the FSLN regime, stop supplying arms to any group in Latin America; nonetheless, both continued providing arms to guerrillas in El Salvador in 1989.³⁶⁷

Meanwhile, Cuban-Soviet security ties began diminishing as the Soviet Union was coming undone. Between 1989 and 1991, the Cubans received 12 MiG-29 fighters but had probably placed an order for more that would go unfulfilled; the same happened to a partially fulfilled order for torpedo-capable patrol boats.³⁶⁸ Moreover, by 1989, Soviet navy reconnaissance aircraft deployments had become only about half as frequent as in previous years.³⁶⁹ Finally, on September 11, 1991, Gorbachev broadcast—in a press conference with the U.S. secretary of state—that the Soviet Union was pulling its troops out of Cuba, “only a matter of days after the defeat of the ‘August coup’ in Moscow that had simultaneously ended the power of Cuba’s closest friends in the Soviet ruling elite.”³⁷⁰ Nonetheless, the Lourdes SIGINT facility remained open, and the Soviets were even upgrading its capabilities in 1990.³⁷¹

At the same time, as the Soviet economy deteriorated, economic assistance to Cuba diminished. A new bilateral way forward in December 1990 entailed reduced subsidies, credits, and aid. In the first half of 1991, Soviet exports to Cuba were comprised mostly of oil; by then, the Soviets were no longer exporting staple food items to the island as they had previously.³⁷² Despite Soviet economic difficulties, however,

³⁶⁵ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 86.

³⁶⁶ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 81–83.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 119.

³⁶⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Arms Transfers Database*.

³⁶⁹ “Trimming Its Sails,” *Jane’s Intelligence Weekly*, May 4 1989, 2, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1550660>.

³⁷⁰ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 77.

³⁷¹ Director of Central Intelligence, *Prospects for Soviet Military Assistance to Cuba*, 3.

³⁷² Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 75.

“democratic political forces in the Kremlin who demanded an end to support for Cuba, faced the opposition of Gorbachev himself, who maintained the views held by his predecessors that the political and strategic benefits from close cooperation with Cuba had justified the massive economic expenditure involved in preserving this de facto alliance.”³⁷³ Nonetheless, by 1992, all economic aid had dried up; even oil shipments decreased by 86 percent between 1989 and 1992.³⁷⁴ By 1993, Cuba’s economy had suffered so greatly that its total exports and imports decreased by 75 percent from 1989 levels, and its GDP dropped by over one-third.³⁷⁵

B. CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN-CUBAN TIES

Russian-Cuban ties remained distant in the early to mid-1990s. Bain recounts that “Moscow voted against Havana in the UN Convention on Human Rights in Geneva from 1992 to 1994, which was truly historic because the Kremlin had never previously done so.”³⁷⁶ Moreover, when the UN voted in 1992 to urge the United States to end its three-decade embargo against Cuba, Moscow abstained from voting.³⁷⁷ Bain says, “The importance Moscow attached to relations with Washington negated a close relationship with Havana, given the continued strained nature of Cuban relations.”³⁷⁸ At the same time, economic ties remained strained. As Russia undertook a transition to neoliberal economics in the early 1990s, Russian companies that had previously traded with Cuba stopped doing because “they simply were not in a position to trade with the island due to the gravity of the economic situation facing Russia.”³⁷⁹

Nonetheless, by 1995, Russia began making minor in-roads again with Cuba. At the 1995 UN Convention on Human Rights, Russia returned to voting in Cuba’s favor,

³⁷³ Paszyn, *Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change*, 76.

³⁷⁴ Skidmore, Smith, and Green, *Modern Latin America*, 146.

³⁷⁵ Erisman, *Cuba’s Foreign Relations*, 113.

³⁷⁶ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 78.

³⁷⁷ Frank J. Prial, “UN Votes to Urge U.S. to Dismantle Embargo on Cuba,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/25/world/un-votes-to-urge-us-to-dismantle-embargo-on-cuba.html>.

³⁷⁸ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 79.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

which ostensibly kept Russia itself from being condemned for its own abuses in Chechnya that year.³⁸⁰ That same year, for the first time since the Cold War, a Vishnya-class Russian intelligence collection ship made a port call at Cienfuegos, Cuba, to resupply while out on a three-month mission along the U.S. East Coast. Subsequently, in October 1995, the Russians initiated an upgrade to their capabilities at the Lourdes SIGINT site, which they had kept open despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union.³⁸¹

Then, in 1996, Russia made its first real post-Cold War attempt at reaching out to Cuba, which was one of seven countries that then-Foreign Minister Primakov visited during his tour to regain relations with the region.³⁸² Nonetheless, Sánchez Ramírez indicates that “there was an attempt to reestablish the traditional bilateral ties, but the results were more symbolic than real, and the advance was in political matters rather than economic-commercial ones. Moreover, Cuba's external debt with Russia limited the advance of the negotiations.”³⁸³ Yet, Russian companies did resume doing business with Cuba in the mid-1990s, and in 1996, Russia again became Cuba's top trading partner, despite their trade totaling merely about 600,000 pesos that year—a fraction of a fraction of the trade between the Soviet Union and Cuba during the Cold War.³⁸⁴ Bain highlights, however, that Russia's commercial “interest in Cuba at this time was not repeated with the rest of Latin America. Other countries, most noticeably China and Venezuela, may have subsequently overtaken Russia in importance in the Cuban economy, but this does not reduce the significance of Russian interest in the Cuban economy being stimulated by the desire to right the wrongs of the past.”³⁸⁵ Nonetheless, for at least most of the millennial decade, Cuban government resentment of Soviet abandonment and apprehension of the Russians would seemingly limit their ties, as discussed in the

³⁸⁰ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 81.

³⁸¹ “Russia's Busy Spyships,” *Jane's Intelligence Weekly*, January 25, 1996, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1562162>.

³⁸² Gvosdev and Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 376; Blank, “Russia in Latin America: Geopolitical Games,” 8.

³⁸³ Sánchez Ramírez, “Is a New Climate of Confrontation,” 233.

³⁸⁴ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 80, 86–87.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

following section.³⁸⁶ Cuban-Russian political ties have seemingly grown closer in the past seven years, while security and economic ties remain modest.

1. Political Ties

In December 2000, newly elected President Putin paid a four-day visit to Havana. This visit was significant in that it was only the third visit by a Soviet or Russian head of state since Cuba and the Soviet Union developed relations. Brezhnev had visited in 1974 and Gorbachev in 1989.³⁸⁷ Yet, while the event was celebrated, Putin reportedly stated during the visit “that he did not travel to this former bastion of the cold war to recreate a ‘union’ with Cuba against the United States, but rather to clean up the economic ‘mess’ left over from the Soviet era.”³⁸⁸ Putin reportedly celebrated the renewed amity between the two countries and bemoaned that the abandonment that Cuba had to endure as a result of Russia’s departure from the island after the Soviet Union collapsed.³⁸⁹ As detailed in the following subsections, those conciliatory sentiments were short-lived; yet, Russia would make political in-roads with Cuba again by the end of the millennial decade.

a. Relations through 2008 Limited by Resentment

Even before Putin ascended to the presidency, according to Mark Katz, “Castro deeply resented the cutoff in aid to Cuba undertaken by Mikhail Gorbachev and not reversed by Boris Yeltsin. Moscow, for its part, was unhappy that Cuba had not yet agreed to repay any of the debt it owed from the Soviet era.”³⁹⁰ In an act reminiscent of the Soviets’ betrayal and abandonment of Cuba in 1962 and 1991, in 2001—the year after Putin’s landmark visit—Russia decided to close down the Lourdes site and thus remove the only remaining Russian military unit permanently stationed on the island.

³⁸⁶ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 10; Simon Romero, Michael Schwartz, and Alexei Barrionuevo, “Flux in Latin America Affects Russia’s Diplomacy,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2008, <http://nyti.ms/1TuIYpC>.

³⁸⁷ Krzywicka, “Russian Federation’s Policy toward Latin American States,” 34.

³⁸⁸ Patrick E. Tyler, “Putin, in Cuba, Signals Priority of Ties to U.S.,” *New York Times*, December 16, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/16/world/putin-in-cuba-signals-priority-of-ties-to-us.html>.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Mark N. Katz, “The Putin-Chavez Partnership,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 4 (2006): 3, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2753/PPC1075-8216530401>.

Russian leaders cited fiscal reasons for the closure.³⁹¹ Some Russian elites opposed the closure, saying it was worth paying \$200 million every year to the Castro regime to keep the site and that Putin appeared as if he were kowtowing to U.S. demands for its closure.³⁹² Yet, “Putin’s defenders argued that spending the \$200 million per year on spy satellites would yield richer intelligence, and maintained that American pressure had not influenced his decision.”³⁹³ The irritated Cubans contended that \$200 million of savings equaled only a small fraction of the money that Cuba lost due to the Soviet Union’s collapse.³⁹⁴ At the same time, Russia began pressuring Cuba to pay back the money that it had borrowed from the Soviet Union during the Cold War.³⁹⁵ Cuba denied that it owed anything to Russia and rejected the latter’s prescription of working with the Paris Club to restructure the debt.³⁹⁶ Meanwhile, then-Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stressed to Cuba that their “bilateral relations would be based upon ‘the realities’ of each country and the competitive rules of the international trading system” and thus that Russia would not be subsidizing its trade with Cuba.³⁹⁷

Despite these setbacks, the two countries did maintain some limited political ties in the years after the closure of Lourdes in 2001. For instance, in 2002 and 2003, Russian Duma delegations visited Cuba, and the two countries’ foreign ministers Felipe Pérez Roque and Igor Ivanov each visited the other’s capital in 2003.³⁹⁸ Pérez Roque and Ivanov signed an agreement that year that “committed themselves to common efforts on the international arena aiming at establishing a more just and democratic order of the world....Both states agreed in their negative evaluation of growing unilateralism in the U.S. political activities concerning security and war on terrorism.”³⁹⁹ Moreover, they

³⁹¹ Krzywicka, “Russian Federation’s Policy toward Latin American States,” 34.

³⁹² Katz, “Putin-Chavez Partnership,” 4.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Krzywicka, “Russian Federation’s Policy toward Latin American States,” 34–35.

³⁹⁵ Sánchez Ramírez, “Is a New Climate of Confrontation,” 233.

³⁹⁶ Katz, “Putin-Chavez Partnership,” 4.

³⁹⁷ Negroponte, “What’s Putin’s Game in the Western Hemisphere?”

³⁹⁸ Krzywicka, “Russian Federation’s Policy toward Latin American States,” 35.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

denounced the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (i.e., Helms–Burton) Act—which had intensified the U.S. embargo—as a unilateral action by the United States.⁴⁰⁰ Bain similarly notes that the two countries’ mutual aversion to political uni-polarity after the Cold War was vital to improving relations between them.⁴⁰¹

Nonetheless, Cuba remained resentful of Russia, as shown in its dealings with Russia over the next few years. In 2004, it reportedly would not allow Russia to remove some of the advanced equipment from Lourdes because Russia supposedly still owed it money.⁴⁰² Then, the two had a controversy in 2008, when Putin ostensibly attempted to use the façade of a resumption of military ties with Cuba to exasperate the United States ahead of the Georgia conflict. Putin reportedly insinuated to Russia’s military leaders that it should open an air base on Cuba and then had then-Deputy Prime Minister Sechin and Security Council Secretary Patrushev visit Cuba to confer about restarting their bilateral security ties.⁴⁰³ Yet, a displeased “Cuba refused to bite because these plans were publicly announced without consulting it in advance....Fidel Castro publicly praised Raúl Castro’s restraint in refusing to be provoked by Moscow or by the U.S. Air Force chief of staff...who said that such a base would be crossing a red line.”⁴⁰⁴ Moreover, while Cuba supported Russia’s campaign in Georgia, it sided with the international community in not offering diplomatic recognition to the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as Russia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela did do.⁴⁰⁵ Ellis says, “Cuba’s embrace of Russia’s re-engagement with the region in 2008 was subtly less enthusiastic than that by Venezuela and Nicaragua, arguably reflecting lingering resentment” resulting from the Russians’ swift withdrawal as the Soviet Union was dissolving.⁴⁰⁶ Ellis attributes that resentment to the economic hardship that Cuba had to endure after the Russians

⁴⁰⁰ Krzywicka, “Russian Federation’s Policy toward Latin American States,” 35.

⁴⁰¹ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 81.

⁴⁰² Tamayo, “Report: Russia Will Reopen Spy Base in Cuba.”

⁴⁰³ Blank, “Russia in Latin America: Geopolitical Games,” 12.

⁴⁰⁴ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 163.

⁴⁰⁵ Romero, Schwartz, and Barrionuevo, “Flux in Latin America”; Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 39–40.

⁴⁰⁶ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 39.

withdrew.⁴⁰⁷ Yet, Negroponte offers, “Fidel recognized that his Soviet supporters were unable to maintain the annual subsidy, but he did not wish to lose a relationship that had given him leverage throughout the hemisphere.”⁴⁰⁸

b. Mutual Visits and Political Support Increase

Nonetheless, Russia’s reengagement with Cuba did continue and has increased in recent years. The turning point seems to have taken place in November 2008, when Russia’s then-President Medvedev visited Havana, followed by a visit to Moscow by Cuban President Raúl Castro in January 2009—a first for a Cuban president since Fidel’s visit there about 25 years before.⁴⁰⁹ Medvedev’s visit primarily entailed exploring possible investment deals for Russian national companies in energy, transportation, and other sectors. Castro’s visit entailed the presidents signing a number of memoranda including one regarding strategic engagement.⁴¹⁰

Since then, further high-level engagements and mutual political support have ensued. In 2010, during Foreign Minister Lavrov’s stop in Havana on his Latin America tour, the two sides conferred on not only economic infrastructure but also decided to resume their “strategic partnership,” by which Cuba and Russia would support each other at the UN and at other forums.⁴¹¹ Like Nicaragua, Cuba was one of only 11 countries to vote against the March 2014 UN resolution affirming the sovereignty of Ukraine.⁴¹² Moreover, Cuba was one of Lavrov’s few stops on his tour in the region the following month—in part to propose a Russia-CELAC visa-free travel agreement.⁴¹³ In 2013, Raúl

⁴⁰⁷ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 39.

⁴⁰⁸ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 38 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

⁴⁰⁹ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 168.

⁴¹⁰ Sánchez Ramírez, “Is a New Climate of Confrontation,” 233.

⁴¹¹ Stephen Blank, “Sergei Lavrov Travels to Latin America,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 47, March 10, 2010, http://www.jamestown.org/regions/latinamerica/single/?tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=4&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36136&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=50&cHash=a52587f12ae78c9ed51a5f7e3abc77b9#.VljoAXbTk3E.

⁴¹² Rogers, “Nicaragua Needs New Friends.”

⁴¹³ “Russia Pushes to Deepen Ties in Latin America.”

Castro had held the presidency of CELAC⁴¹⁴; thus, like Nicaragua, Cuba has been important to Russia's outreach to the region. Furthermore, President Putin visited Cuba during his July 2014 visit to the region for the BRICS summit; again, the visit ostensibly showed that Russia is not cut off from international relations despite its involvement in Crimea and Ukraine.⁴¹⁵ At that time, Putin wrote off 90% of the \$32 billion that Cuba has ostensibly owed since the Cold War, while payments on the remainder are to finance Russian investment ventures on the island.⁴¹⁶ As such, Mary O'Grady writes, "It seems that the world's most notorious moochers are willing to forgive—for the right price. With sugar-daddy Venezuela running into economic problems in recent years and Mr. Putin itching for a place in the Caribbean sun, Cuba has decided to deal."⁴¹⁷ Thereafter, Cuban political support to Russia continued. In a September 2015 speech at the UN, President Castro spoke out against Western sanctions on Russia, as well as NATO's expanded military force presence closer to Russia.⁴¹⁸

Meanwhile, Russia backs Cuba politically as well. For instance, in October 2015, Russia again spoke out against the U.S. embargo against Cuba in a speech to the UN General Assembly.⁴¹⁹ With regard to ongoing U.S.-Cuban rapprochement, "Russian officials publicly welcomed the improvement in U.S.-Cuban relations, although the change in U.S. policy could be viewed as a potential setback for Russian overtures in the region."⁴²⁰ As the normalization discussions commenced in January 2015, Russia had an intelligence collection ship in port at Havana.⁴²¹ Nevertheless, when Lavrov visited not

⁴¹⁴ Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 19.

⁴¹⁵ Blank, "Vladimir Putin's Latin American Tour."

⁴¹⁶ Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 18.

⁴¹⁷ Mary Anastasia O'Grady, "Putin Restores a Cuban Beachhead," *Wall Street Journal*, July 28, 2014, Eastern Edition, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/mary-ograde-putin-restores-a-cuban-beachhead-1406496813>.

⁴¹⁸ "Cuba Rejects NATO Expansion along Russian Borders, Sanctions Against Moscow," *Sputnik News*, September 28, 2015, <http://sptnkne.ws/PzC>.

⁴¹⁹ "Russian Parliament Urges UN to Call for End of Cuba Embargo," *Sputnik News*, October 23, 2015, <http://sptnkne.ws/aFSJ>.

⁴²⁰ Mark P. Sullivan, *Cuba: Issues for the 114th Congress* (CRS Report No. R43926) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 11, 2016), 16, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43926.pdf>.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

only Nicaragua but also Cuba when he came to attend the SICA meeting in March 2015, “he expressed complete confidence that nothing would break the old ties between Moscow and Havana.”⁴²² In contrast, Ellis argues that Cuban resentment is still a factor, saying that “the Cubans, who felt a lingering bitterness over the suffering inflicted on them when Russia abruptly cut off its economic aid at the end of the Cold War, now held Russia at arms-length and kept a relatively low profile, hoping to escape from under the 50-year old U.S. sanctions regime.”⁴²³

Whether the Castro regime and Cuban people still resent Russian abandonment, one factor may affect the future of Cuban-Russian relations—the Cuban leadership transition coming up in 2018. At the start of his current term in 2013, Raúl Castro broadcast that he did not desire to continue as president for the term starting in 2018.⁴²⁴ Thus, unlike in Nicaragua where Russia has a seemingly perpetual ally in President Ortega, the approaching leadership transition in Cuba could change Cuban-Russian relations to some extent. Then again, Raúl has been hastily grooming the next generation—born after 1959—of presidential hopefuls in the ranks of the bureaucracy. They include Raúl’s children; the current first vice-president of the Council of State, Miguel Díaz-Canel; and Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, who was recently released from a U.S. prison after serving time on espionage charges.⁴²⁵

2. Security Ties

Although Cuba and Russia have since 2008 redeveloped political ties similar to their political ties during the halcyon days of their relationship in the 1970s and most of the 1980s, there is no strong indication that the two countries have revived their military ties since 2008. Certainly, the limited security-related engagements between them in this millennium have not come remotely close to the military ties that the Soviet Union and

⁴²² Blank, “His Master’s Voice.”

⁴²³ Ellis, “Russian Influence in Latin America.”

⁴²⁴ Damien Cave, “Raúl Castro Says His New 5-Year Term as Cuba’s President Will Be His Last,” *New York Times*, February 24, 2013, <http://nyti.ms/18sT0Ub>.

⁴²⁵ “Internal Affairs, Cuba,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment – Central America and the Caribbean*, updated February 8, 2016, 2, <https://janes.ihs.com/AirportHandlingCAC/Display/1302130>.

Cuba had—with their joint operations, sales of mass quantities of advanced military hardware to Cuba, Soviet troops and advisers stationed in Cuba, and the introduction of nuclear weapons to the island. The following subsections discuss current military ties between the two countries.

a. Limited Naval Deployments

The Russian navy has made some port calls in Cuba, but the frequency of combat vessel visits is very minor compared to the presence of the Soviet navy in Cuba in the past. When the aforementioned Russian surface action group deployed to the Caribbean in 2008—a first for the Russian navy since 1988—the *Admiral Chabanenko* visited Cuba for four days after departing Nicaragua.⁴²⁶ Cuba’s navy did not take part in the exercise that the Venezuelan navy conducted with the Russian flotilla during that deployment. Years later, in September 2013, two Russian navy vessels on an out-of-area patrol again visited Cuba and then went on to Nicaragua as mentioned.⁴²⁷ Moreover, Russian intelligence collection ships have made periodic pit stops in Cuba over the years. As mentioned, in 1995, a Vishnya-class Russian intelligence collection ship made a port call at Cienfuegos, Cuba, to resupply while conducting its three-month mission.⁴²⁸ In recent years, the *Viktor Leonov* Vishnya-class collection ship has made port calls in Havana during some moments of political tension between Russia and the United States. The ship visited Havana on the very same day in February 2014 that Shoigu proclaimed Russia’s aforementioned ostensible plans for bases in Cuba and other countries, as tensions were high over the Ukraine crisis.⁴²⁹ Moreover, as noted previously, as U.S.-Cuban normalization discussions commenced in January 2015, Russia had the *Viktor Leonov* in

⁴²⁶ Gorenburg, “Russian Naval Deployments,” 2.

⁴²⁷ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 27, 40.

⁴²⁸ “Russia’s Busy Spyships.”

⁴²⁹ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 168; Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 40–41.

port at Havana.⁴³⁰ According to the press, however, “The Pentagon said that it tracks the *Viktor Leonov* all the time and that there is nothing to worry about.”⁴³¹

While Russian navy vessels have stopped in at Cuba occasionally, Russia’s military aircraft apparently have not. When two Russian Tu-160 strategic bombers made their aforementioned long-range patrol to the Caribbean in 2008, they did not land in Cuba, as they did in Venezuela.⁴³² In 2009, Russian leaders were reportedly considering deploying such bombers to Cuba while on their long-range patrols.⁴³³ The talks did not materialize; when another pair of Tu-160s flew to the Caribbean in 2013, they again did not land in Cuba but instead landed in both Venezuela and Nicaragua.⁴³⁴

Speaking of dubious Russian military plans involving Cuba, in a February 2015 meeting, the chief of the General Staff of Russia’s military stated that Russia was conducting initial talks with Cuba, Brazil, Vietnam, and North Korea to hold joint exercises together.⁴³⁵ The likelihood of such exercises taking place may be about the same as the likelihood of Cuba actually—versus fictitiously—deploying troops to Syria to assist President Assad’s government alongside the Russian military. Gone are the days when Cuba deployed forces overseas in joint operations with the Russians.⁴³⁶

b. Russia Unlikely to Have Bases in Cuba

Besides Putin’s aforementioned disingenuous 2008 insinuations of having airbases in Cuba and the 2009 discussion by Russian leaders on possibly landing deployed bombers there, Russian leadership discussion of base access occurred again in

⁴³⁰ Jim Avila and Serena Marshall, “Russian Spy Ship’s Arrival in Cuba Raises Eyebrows,” *ABC News*, January 21, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/russian-spy-ships-arrival-cuba-raises-eyebrows/story?id=28377558>.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³² Felgenhauer, “Russian Strategic Bombers Touch Down.”

⁴³³ Sánchez, “Russia and Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” 371.

⁴³⁴ Felgenhauer, “Russian Strategic Bombers Touch Down.”

⁴³⁵ Damien Sharkov, “Russia Plans Joint Military Drills with North Korea and Cuba,” *Newsweek*, February 2, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/russia-plans-joint-military-drills-north-korea-and-cuba-303836>.

⁴³⁶ Daniel Trotta, “Cuba Denies It Has Sent Troops to Syria to Help Assad,” *Reuters*, October 17, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-cuba-idUSKCN0SC00D20151018>.

2014 and 2015, as mentioned.⁴³⁷ In February 2015, the Russian deputy defense minister clarified that Russia did not seek actual military bases but rather a set of locations for resupply, maintenance, and crew rest for its ships and aircraft.⁴³⁸ Then, in October 2015, a high-level Russian foreign ministry official reiterated that Russia had no plans of establishing a military base in Cuba.⁴³⁹ Whether Russia truly seeks only base access, or rather actual bases of its own, its aims have not apparently materialized, save the few aforementioned naval deployments. Ellis highlights that “although Russia had previously mentioned its interest in base access agreements with Venezuela and Cuba, the only such accord to materialize when Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited the region in February 2015 was a relatively minor deal with Nicaragua.”⁴⁴⁰ Sánchez mentions that if Cuba were to allow Russia to have a military base, it would be tremendously detrimental to Havana’s efforts to improve its ties with Washington.⁴⁴¹

Meanwhile, press reports released after President Putin’s visit to Havana in 2014 rumored that the Lourdes SIGINT site would reopen. Putin refuted the reports.⁴⁴² While the Lourdes site may not reopen, an endeavor that could actually proceed is the establishment of a satellite control station in Cuba for Russia’s GLONASS. During Putin’s 2014 visit, he did reportedly argue for a GLONASS station not only in Nicaragua but also in Cuba, as well as in the other countries he visited.⁴⁴³

c. Apparent Lack of Counter-Narcotics Cooperation

According to Katarzyna Krzywicka, in the aforementioned March 2003 meeting between Cuba and Russia’s foreign ministers, the two sides “committed themselves to

⁴³⁷ Blank, “Russia in Latin America: Geopolitical Games,” 12; Sánchez, “Russia and Latin America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” 371; Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 41; Keck, “Russia Says It’s Building Naval Bases”; “Russia Has No Plans to Create Military Bases in Latin America.”

⁴³⁸ “Russia Has No Plans to Create Military Bases in Latin America.”

⁴³⁹ “Russia Has No Plans to Open Military Base in Cuba,” *Sputnik News*, October 26, 2015, <http://sptnkne.ws/X5g>.

⁴⁴⁰ Ellis, “Russian Influence in Latin America.”

⁴⁴¹ Sánchez, “Geosecurity 101,” 5.

⁴⁴² Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 18.

⁴⁴³ Blank, “Vladimir Putin’s Latin American Tour.”

fight international terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational crime.”⁴⁴⁴ Nearly a decade later, in 2012, Russian FSKN director, Viktor Ivanov visited Cuba during his aforementioned tour to solicit cooperation in countering illicit drug trafficking.⁴⁴⁵ While Russia has been quite involved in counter-narcotics cooperation with Nicaragua as detailed in the previous chapter, it has apparently not done so with Cuba, which may not need the help. Per the U.S. State Department’s *2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, “Cuba dedicates significant resources to prevent illegal drugs and their use from spreading, and regional traffickers typically avoid Cuba.”⁴⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Cuban authorities do conduct counterdrug cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard; the two sides share tactical intelligence that has assisted with a number of interdictions.⁴⁴⁷

d. Some Military Equipment Refurbishment

In stark contrast to the vast quantities of military equipment that Cuba imported from the Soviets during the Cold War, it has reportedly not received any military systems from Russia since the Cold War ended due to resource constraints. Reportedly, however, Cuba has ordered for its existing MiG fighters an unknown number of AA-11 air-to-air missiles that were to have arrived by December 2015.⁴⁴⁸ According to *Jane’s*, “this procurement is the first public announcement of its sort in a long time as Cuba is very well known for its secrecy. Its last shipment of air-to-air missiles dates back to 1985.”⁴⁴⁹

Due to the dearth of new systems, refurbishment and local production have been essential for the maintenance of Cuba’s Soviet-era equipment over the years. Russia has reportedly assisted with upgrading Cuba’s existing air defense equipment, particularly its SAM systems and ground-based radars.⁴⁵⁰ Indeed, when a high-level Russian military

⁴⁴⁴ Krzywicka, “Russian Federation’s Policy toward Latin American States,” 35.

⁴⁴⁵ Marshall, *From Drug War to Culture War*, 16.

⁴⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Drug and Chemical Control*, 146.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ “Procurement, Cuba,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment – Central America and the Caribbean*, updated December 14, 2015, 2, 4, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302138>.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, 4.

delegation visited the island in October 2008 for the first time since the closure of Lourdes in 2002, the visit pertained merely to technical matters related to Cuba's Soviet-made SAM systems.⁴⁵¹ In recent years, Cuba has resorted to skirting the UN ban on transferring weapons to North Korea, ostensibly to upgrade its equipment. In 2013, Cuba attempted shipping two of its MiG-21s, 15 MiG-21 engines, and SAM system components to North Korea, supposedly to have them serviced there and then sent back to Cuba. Panamanian authorities interdicted the shipment.⁴⁵²

3. Economic Ties

As mentioned, by 1992, all economic aid that Cuba had been previously receiving from the Soviet Union dried up.⁴⁵³ Thereafter, Russia would never again have remotely as close of economic ties with Cuba as the Soviet Union did. Showing the contrast, Negroponte indicates that "whereas over the previous 33 years the Soviet Union could subsidize the Cuban economy with oil, trucks, tourists and military hardware to the tune of \$4–5 billion a year, Russia after 1992 did not have the cash to maintain its economic support to the island."⁴⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Cuba's economy grew over the rest of the decade, "as Cuba moved forward with some limited market-oriented economic reforms."⁴⁵⁵ In the mid-2000s, Cuba's economy grew particularly stronger, with 11% growth in 2005 and 12% in 2006 and came to benefit from economic ties with Venezuela and China.⁴⁵⁶ In light of the dearth of oil imports from Russia, the Castro regime came to rely on oil imports from Venezuela via Hugo Chávez's Petrocaribe subsidized oil program.⁴⁵⁷ Since the late 1990s, Cuban-Russian economic ties have entailed relatively insignificant commerce, seemingly little aid to Cuba but some financing, and energy projects that have yet to produce results. The most significant aspect of their economic ties seems to be the

⁴⁵¹ Smith, "Russia & Latin America," 13.

⁴⁵² Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 21–23.

⁴⁵³ Skidmore, Smith, and Green, *Modern Latin America*, 146.

⁴⁵⁴ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 38 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

⁴⁵⁵ Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 13.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 38 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

restructurings of Cuba's debts and the civilian aircraft deals seemingly linked to the restructurings.⁴⁵⁸

a. Comparatively Insignificant Commerce, Limited Aid

As noted earlier, in the mid-1990s, Russian companies made in-roads with resuming trade with Cuba, and Russia even became Cuba's top trading partner once again in 1996. Nonetheless, their trade remained miniscule compared to Soviet-Cuban trade.⁴⁵⁹ After that post-Cold War peak in 1996, their bilateral trade began to drop off significantly, as depicted in Figures 3 and 4. The marked decline may have resulted from the recession affecting Russia in the late 1990s, as well as the aforementioned political fallout between Russia and Cuba after the closure of Lourdes. Russia's top export to Cuba in the peak year of 1996 was oil, but its oil exports to the island plummeted thereafter. Likewise, whereas Cuba's sugar exports to Russia soared in 2001, by 2002 they were on a steep decline. Since then, Cuba's exports to Russia have remained relatively low. Cuban imports from Russia did resurge during Cuba's aforementioned period of high growth in the mid-2000s and during the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and 2009. Major imports in those years included vehicle parts including engines and tires, especially for public service or commercial vehicles; aircraft; boiler parts; and electrical equipment. Finally, as was the case for Nicaragua, Cuba's imports from Russia have experienced a marked decline since 2014.⁴⁶⁰ While significantly lower in total value in 2014, Cuba's top imports from Russia continued to include machinery, engines, and other vehicle parts, as well as aircraft. Likewise, while much lower in quantity than in the past, sugar remained Cuba's top export to Russia.⁴⁶¹

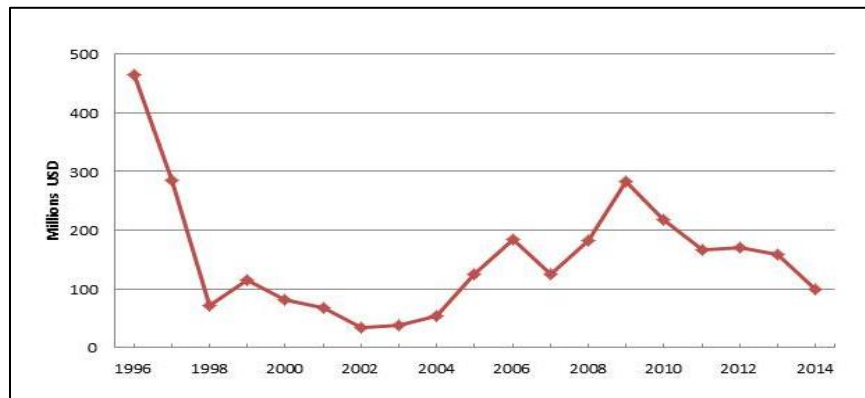
⁴⁵⁸ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 39 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

⁴⁵⁹ Bain, "Havana and Moscow," 80.

⁴⁶⁰ "UN Comtrade."

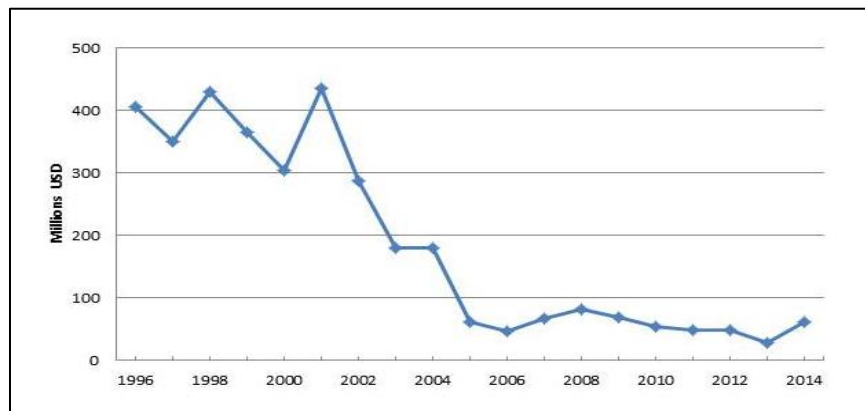
⁴⁶¹ "Trade Map."

Figure 3. Cuban Imports from Russia



Source: “UN Comtrade,” UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

Figure 4. Cuban Exports to Russia



Source: “UN Comtrade,” UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

Due to its economic losses after the Soviet Union’s collapse, Cuba had to diversify its commercial partners. Venezuela, China, Canada, and Spain among others have become major economic partners of the island country.⁴⁶² In 2014, Cuba imported about \$3.5 billion of goods from and exported about \$1 billion of goods to Venezuela—about 27 times the value of overall trade that Cuba did with Russia that year. Even the

⁴⁶² Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 17.

United States exported about three times the value of goods to Cuba that Russia did in 2014. In fact, U.S. exports to Cuba have been greater in value than Russia's every year since 2002.⁴⁶³ The U.S. Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA) of 2000 has permitted U.S. farmers to export agricultural products to Cuba; in 2014, the top U.S. exports to Cuba were poultry and soybeans.⁴⁶⁴

While commercial links between Cuba and Russia have been miniscule in comparison with the ubiquity of the Soviet Union in Cuba's economy for most of their Cold-War relationship, so has Russian aid to Cuba apparently been limited. Reportedly, during Raúl Castro's visit to Moscow in 2009, he and Medvedev signed an accord regarding food aid.⁴⁶⁵ Then, in 2010, Russia reportedly did donate 100,000 tons of wheat and other aid to Cuba to help it recover from hurricanes that struck the island in 2008.⁴⁶⁶ While the literature has not revealed any other instances of free aid from Russia to Cuba this millennium, Russia has offered Cuba loans, such as a \$150 million loan in 2009 for it to be able to buy machinery for construction and agriculture.⁴⁶⁷ Altogether, Russia's limited trade with and aid to Cuba support Blank's assertion that "Russia will only partially, if at all, meet Latin American expectations for support, even in stricken economies like Cuba."⁴⁶⁸

b. Energy Projects sans Results

Meanwhile, Russia has invested in some energy-related projects in Cuba, but they have thus far not produced any results. First is the two-reactor nuclear power plant that the Soviets had started building in Cienfuegos Province, Cuba, in 1983. Construction halted in 1992 when the Soviet assistance writ large dried up. Due to a lack of financing

⁴⁶³ International Monetary Fund, "Merchandise Trade by Country."

⁴⁶⁴ *Agricultural Trade with Cuba: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Non-Proliferation, and Trade, House of Representatives*, 114th Cong., 2–3 (September 9, 2015) (statement of Phil Karsting, U.S. Department of Agriculture), <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/subcommitte-hearing-agricultural-trade-cuba>.

⁴⁶⁵ Smith, "Russia & Latin America," 13.

⁴⁶⁶ "External Affairs, Cuba," *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Central America and the Caribbean*, updated December 23, 2015, 6, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302132>.

⁴⁶⁷ Smith, "Russia & Latin America," 13.

⁴⁶⁸ Blank, "Russia and Latin America: Motives and Consequences," 2.

the project failed to restart; nonetheless, the Russians still desired to proceed with the project in the 1990s until Fidel Castro finally told Putin during his 2000 visit to the island that Cuba had lost interest.⁴⁶⁹ More recently, three Russian companies have invested in oil exploration projects in the waters of Cuba's exclusive economic zone, with no success to date. Mark Sullivan says, "Gazprom had been in a partnership with the Malaysian state oil company Petronas that conducted unsuccessful deepwater oil drilling off of Cuba's western coast in 2012. The Russian oil company Zarubezhneft began drilling in Cuba's shallow coastal waters east of Havana in December 2012, but stopped work in April 2013 because of disappointing results."⁴⁷⁰ Then, in 2014, Russia's Rosneft and Zarubezhneft signed on with Cuba's state-owned CubaPetroleo to develop another offshore area.⁴⁷¹ As may be the case with any attempts at such projects in Nicaragua, it may be that ongoing low oil prices and economic sanctions from the West will inhibit the Russian companies' financing for this project.⁴⁷² Finally, in October 2015, the Russian government reportedly offered Cuba a 1.2 billion euro credit to finance the construction of generating units at two existing thermal power plants in Cuba.⁴⁷³ This project shows that, despite Russia's ongoing economic plight, it has extended some assistance to Cuba. It will be worth noting how those two projects unfold if they do indeed come to fruition.

c. Debt Restructurings and Civilian Aircraft Deals

Debt restructurings and civilian aircraft deals may be the most significant aspects of Cuban-Russian economic ties today. Russia's restructuring of Cuba's debts to it may seem magnanimous on Russia's part, but such write-offs seemingly have been linked with Cuba's subsequent acquisition of Russian civilian aircraft.⁴⁷⁴ According to Negroponte, "Russian restructuring of Cuban debt became a regular fixture until 2014. A

⁴⁶⁹ "Country Profiles: Cuba," Nuclear Threat Initiative, updated June 2015, <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/cuba/>.

⁴⁷⁰ Sullivan, *Cuba: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, 18.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 78.

⁴⁷³ "Russia to Provide Cuba with 1.2-Bln-Euro Credit for Construction of Power Plants," Interfax News Service, October 20, 2015, <http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?id=627292>.

⁴⁷⁴ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 39 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

percentage of the debt is restructured AND [sic] Cuba buys or leases Russian aircraft. The value of the sale or lease agreement often approaches the amount of restructured interest due!”⁴⁷⁵ She goes on to highlight that after Russia restructured \$166 million of Cuba’s debt in 2004, Cuba subsequently leased two Ilyushin aircraft for \$110 million. Likewise, in 2006, Cuba was able to buy five aircraft—three Tupolev and two Ilyushin—on a Russia-backed export guarantee.⁴⁷⁶ Finally, regarding the aforementioned recent write-off of about 90 percent of Cuba’s \$32 billion of supposed debt to Russia, Negroponte mentions, “both governments have sought to resolve the debt issue so that the Cuban government could lease 8 more Russian jets, valued at \$650 million.”⁴⁷⁷

C. CONCLUSION

Contrasts are drastically apparent between Soviet-Cuban ties during their halcyon days of the 1970s and 1980s and Russian-Cuban ties in the contemporary era. While the Castro regime and the Soviets experienced six years of tumultuous ties in the 1960s, they reconciled and became politically close, and the Soviets became ubiquitous in Cuban political, military, and economic affairs. As with Cuban resentment due to the outcome of the Missile Crisis negotiations, the Castro regime resented Russian abandonment after the Cold War came to a close and again in the early 2000s with the closing of Lourdes and other setbacks in their bilateral ties. Yet, as in 1968, political reconciliation seemingly occurred again in late 2008. Since then, Cuba and Russia have provided each other political support reminiscent of their political ties from 1968 until the late 1980s.

Yet, in contrast, Cuba and Russia have not developed all-encompassing security and economic ties, both of which remain quite modest. Russia has not provided massive quantities of advanced weapon systems and training to the Cuban military, maintained a military contingent on the island, and conducted joint military operations with the Cuban military as the Soviets did—not to mention the Soviet placement of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles on the island. Russian-Cuban security ties today have mostly entailed

⁴⁷⁵ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 39 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

sporadic naval vessel port calls and some equipment refurbishing. At the same time, the Russians have not been omnipresent in the organization and activities of Cuba's bureaucracy and economy as the Soviets were. Today, trade and aid have been relatively insignificant. Russian loans, energy project investments, and especially debt restructurings and aircraft deals have given their economic relationship some substance. The major debt restructuring in 2014 may show that Russia desires to deepen their ties. Nonetheless, overall, one cannot say that the Soviet "bear"—defined by not only deep political ties but also a significant military presence in and deep economic ties with Cuba—has returned to Cuba. Meanwhile, as noted in the previous chapter, Russia's ties with Nicaragua today are arguably closer than its ties with Cuba due to Russia's seemingly deeper security-related engagement with Nicaragua in recent years. Cuban resentment is not necessarily the root of Cuban-Russian ties being seemingly lesser in depth than Nicaraguan-Russian ties because Cuban resentment seemingly diminished to some extent in late 2008 to early 2009. These findings have implications for U.S. policy, which Chapter IV will address.

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IV. CONCLUSION

A. ANALYSIS OF THE HYPOTHESES

The case studies of Nicaragua and Cuba support hypothesis 1 of this thesis that engagement between contemporary Russia and former Soviet allies in Latin America does not represent a return of the Soviet “bear” to the U.S. periphery. While Ortega-led Nicaragua and the Castro regime in Cuba have become close with Russia politically since 2008 and have each received limited economic and security support from Russia, neither regime has developed military or economic ties with Russia nearly to the extent to which they did with the Soviet Union. Cuban-Russian engagement today does not involve Russia providing vast amounts of advanced weapon systems and training to the Cuban military, maintaining a military contingent on the island, conducting joint military operations with the Cubans, or placing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles on the island as the Soviets did. Nor does it today entail Russia being omnipresent in Cuba’s bureaucracy and economy as the Soviet Union was. Likewise, Nicaraguan-Russian engagement today does not involve Russia providing extensive military and economic support to undergird the FSLN regime against U.S. efforts to undermine it—as the Soviets did in the 1980s. As the sun was setting on the Soviet Union, “Marxism-Leninism was completely removed from Moscow’s foreign policy.”⁴⁷⁸ As such, Russian engagement in Latin America today “is not a return to the proxy fights of the Cold War, but instead indicates Russian outreach in the search for markets and friends...who can buy their hardware, enter into joint ventures on energy products and provide votes in Russia’s favor at the UN General Assembly.”⁴⁷⁹

Cuba and Nicaragua are two of those “friends.” While military and economic ties between those two and Russia have been relatively narrow, they have since 2008 provided political support to Russia against U.S. interests and permitted sporadic Russian military deployments—most significantly the Tu-160s that landed in Nicaragua in

⁴⁷⁸ Bain, “Havana and Moscow,” 78.

⁴⁷⁹ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 38 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

October 2013. Those manifestations of their renewed relations seemingly support that Russian engagement in the region today is mostly for the geopolitical purpose of challenging U.S. global hegemony—including demonstrating displeasure with U.S./NATO military activities in Russia’s periphery—rather than an interest in the affairs of the Latin American states themselves.⁴⁸⁰ At the same time, Russia’s aforementioned training center in Managua could additionally be an effort “to displace U.S. counter-narcotics efforts in the hemisphere,” as Farah has posited.⁴⁸¹ In the early 2000s—except for a period after the September 11, 2001 attacks—Putin’s administration embraced a confrontational foreign policy approach against what it had come to view as U.S. political aggressiveness toward achieving global hegemony.⁴⁸² Then, during Putin’s 2004–2008 presidential term, his government’s foreign policy approach emphasized maintaining Russia’s sovereignty by keeping the West out of Russia’s historic periphery, after the Baltic states joined NATO in 2004 and allowed it to use former Soviet bases.⁴⁸³ Since Russia’s reengagement with Cuba and Nicaragua in 2008 took off in the context of Russia’s periphery-centric foreign policy approach, the reengagement clearly would not entail Russia bolstering the Cuban and Nicaraguan regimes, as in the Cold War. Rather, it entailed those former Soviet allies supporting Russia in its own political and sovereignty struggle with the West. The reengagement is reminiscent of Cuba’s early-1960s criticism of the Soviets as having been only concerned with the national security of the Soviet Union itself.⁴⁸⁴ Nonetheless, as noted in the two case studies, Russia has rewarded Nicaragua and Cuba’s geopolitical support with some political, security-related, and economic support.

In support of hypothesis 2, while Russian economic and security-related support to the former Soviet allies in Latin America has been relatively narrow and Russian

⁴⁸⁰ Blank and Kim, “Russia and Latin America,” 160, 169; Ellis, “Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean,” 2.

⁴⁸¹ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*: 9 (statement of Douglas Farah).

⁴⁸² Dina Rome Spechler, “Russian Foreign Policy During the Putin Presidency: The Impact of Competing Approaches,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 57, no. 5 (2010): 36–37, 40, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216570503>.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 40, 44.

⁴⁸⁴ Blight and Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days*, 98–99.

deployments and basing talks seem fleeting, certain limited aspects of their ties may portend enduring, versus ephemeral, ties between them. For instance, the extent of Nicaraguan-Russian counter-narcotics cooperation may portend an enduring Russian presence in Nicaragua, especially in light of the newly constructed training center in Managua. Likewise, Russia's relief of the vast majority of Cuba's purported Soviet-era debt could portend enduring and deepening economic ties between the two old allies in the future. Such activities do not represent a near-term threat to the United States, but Russian activities in the Western Hemisphere are of concern and thus require monitoring.⁴⁸⁵

Meanwhile, this thesis has only partly supported hypothesis 3 that Russia's ties with Nicaragua today are greater than its ties with Cuba due to Cuban resentment of Russian abandonment. Indeed, Cuban resentment seemingly was a roadblock in Russia's path toward reengaging with Cuba in the post-Cold War era.⁴⁸⁶ Yet, while Nicaraguan-Russian ties today are arguably closer than Cuban-Russian ties due to deeper Nicaraguan-Russian security engagement in recent years, Cuban resentment seemingly diminished in late 2008 to early 2009; evidence of that amelioration can be found in the uptick in Cuban-Russian political engagements, mutual political support, energy project attempts, and the 2014 major restructuring of Cuba's debt. Thus, this thesis does not support the underlying reasoning of hypothesis 3—that Cuba's resentment has made it less close with Russia than Nicaragua is.

Finally, the findings of this thesis do support hypothesis 4—that Russia's economic ties with Nicaragua and Cuba have declined since 2014 due to such factors as the downturn of the oil market and the economic sanctions against Russia. Indeed, as noted in Chapter II, while Nicaraguan-Russian trade and Russian aid to Nicaragua increased after 2008, they decreased in 2014, and investment projects have remained tenuous. Meanwhile, as covered in Chapter III, Cuban-Russian trade also had a marked downturn in 2014, and it has yet to be seen whether current Russian energy investment plans in Cuba will come to fruition. Thus, this thesis supports the contention that low oil

⁴⁸⁵ *U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command*, 9 (statement of General John F. Kelly).

⁴⁸⁶ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 10.

prices and the sanctions against Russia since 2014 are likely to inhibit Russian financing for projects in Latin America.⁴⁸⁷

B. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

The most significant takeaway of these findings for U.S. policy is to not adopt a “red scare” mentality about Russia’s reengagement with former Soviet allies in Latin America. When policymakers read statements such as the following in journal articles, they should not be overly alarmed: “In Nicaragua and Cuba, Russia has attempted to reactivate political-military networks created during the Cold War.”⁴⁸⁸ Russia’s sporadic naval and strategic bomber deployments, talks with limited success to secure basing agreements, counter-narcotics cooperation with Nicaragua, limited economic ties with the region, and mutual votes counter to U.S. positions at the UN do not mean that Russia has relaunched the deep security and economic ties that the Soviet Union had with Cuba and Nicaragua. Russia has reengaged with its old allies to secure their support, but U.S. policymakers should understand the comparative limitedness of its ties with Cuba and Nicaragua today.

Nonetheless, in agreement with General Kelly, Russia’s reengagement with Nicaragua, Cuba, and the region writ large does signify that the United States should continue engaging its partners in the region.⁴⁸⁹ Doing so could prevent further states from aligning politically with Russia and countering U.S. interests. Moreover, U.S. engagement with these former Soviet allies could soften their anti-U.S. political stance and perhaps serve to lessen their ties with Russia. Ongoing U.S.-Cuban rapprochement has not necessarily tempered the Castro regime’s political support of Russia, as evidenced by President Raúl Castro’s September 2015 speech at the UN, in which he spoke out against Western sanctions on Russia and NATO’s expanded military force presence closer to Russia.⁴⁹⁰ Nonetheless, as rapprochement continues, perhaps it will

⁴⁸⁷ Ellis, *New Russian Engagement*, 76–78.

⁴⁸⁸ Ellis, “Russian Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean,” 3.

⁴⁸⁹ *U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command*, 9 (statement of General John F. Kelly).

⁴⁹⁰ “Cuba Rejects NATO Expansion along Russian Borders, Sanctions Against Moscow.”

moderate Castro's political stance vis-à-vis Russia—or the stance of his replacement after the 2018 leadership transition in Cuba. Moreover, as with Cuba, perhaps rapprochement with the Ortega regime in Nicaragua is possible and desirable as a way to limit Russia's foothold there. Yet, if the U.S. government wishes to attempt political reconciliation with Ortega—who may remain in power for a long time—it may be easier to do under a Democratic president, namely by President Obama before his current term ends. According to Héctor Perla, Jr. and Héctor Cruz-Feliciano, Ortega has tempered his anti-U.S. tone vis-à-vis President Obama, portraying him “as a victim of the rules of empire, hawkish advisers, and conservative bureaucrats who try to sabotage the administration from within.”⁴⁹¹ Despite his anti-U.S. rhetoric, Ortega has shown that he is willing to work with the United States in the interest of practicality, notably by not withdrawing from the CAFTA-DR agreement with the United States, to which Nicaragua acceded under the Bolaños administration before Ortega's return to power.⁴⁹²

Besides political engagement with U.S. partners and the former Soviet allies in Latin America, the United States should further ties with them through security and developmental assistance, which in addition to mitigating socioeconomic and security problems, would help limit Russian influence in the region. In October 2015, Dr. Negroponte recommended to Congress:

We should pass the billion-dollar program to support Central America. The underlying problems of the region are poverty and unequal distribution of wealth. If we are not to show that we care about these underlying problems exacerbated further by the drug trade, exacerbated further by the presence of military weapons, then we should expect that others will fill that space. I sincerely hope that space is not filled by Russia.⁴⁹³

The Consolidated Appropriations Act that Congress approved and the President signed in December 2015 does not provide the proposed \$1 billion but “provides ‘up to’ \$750 million to implement the new U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America in

⁴⁹¹ Perla and Cruz-Feliciano, “Twenty-first-Century Left,” 85.

⁴⁹² Shifter, “Central America's Security Predicament,” 54.

⁴⁹³ *Russian Engagement in the Western Hemisphere*, 36–37 (statement of Diana Villiers Negroponte).

support of the Alliance for Prosperity.”⁴⁹⁴ A small portion of the new funding will be for U.S. assistance to Nicaragua.⁴⁹⁵ Such new assistance, in addition to the existing U.S. counter-narcotics efforts with Nicaragua highlighted in Chapter II, could serve to diminish—to some extent—the importance of Russia’s counter-narcotics assistance to Nicaragua.

Finally, an implication of the findings of this thesis is that if U.S. policymakers wish to limit Russia’s ability to expand its economic ties with former Soviet allies in Latin America, as well as with other countries in the region and beyond, then they should continue the current economic sanctions against Russia and endeavor to keep oil prices low. Meanwhile, the United States should strive to capitalize on its trade ties with Cuba and Nicaragua, to remain more economically important to those countries than Russia is. As the United States continues normalizing relations diplomatically with Cuba, it should consider promoting efforts to expand its economic ties—such as trade and remittances—with Cuba as a means of furthering cooperation between the two countries.⁴⁹⁶ For instance, U.S. policymakers could promote the increase of U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba, which now imports roughly three-quarters of its food. U.S. agricultural exports to the island have decreased since a peak in 2008, while European and Brazilian competitors have made gains in the Cuban agricultural export market.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, *President Obama’s \$1 Billion Foreign Aid Request for Central America* (CRS Insight No. IN10237) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 5, 2016), 2, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IN10237.pdf>.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁹⁶ *Agricultural Trade with Cuba*, 2, 4 (statement of Phil Karsting).

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

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